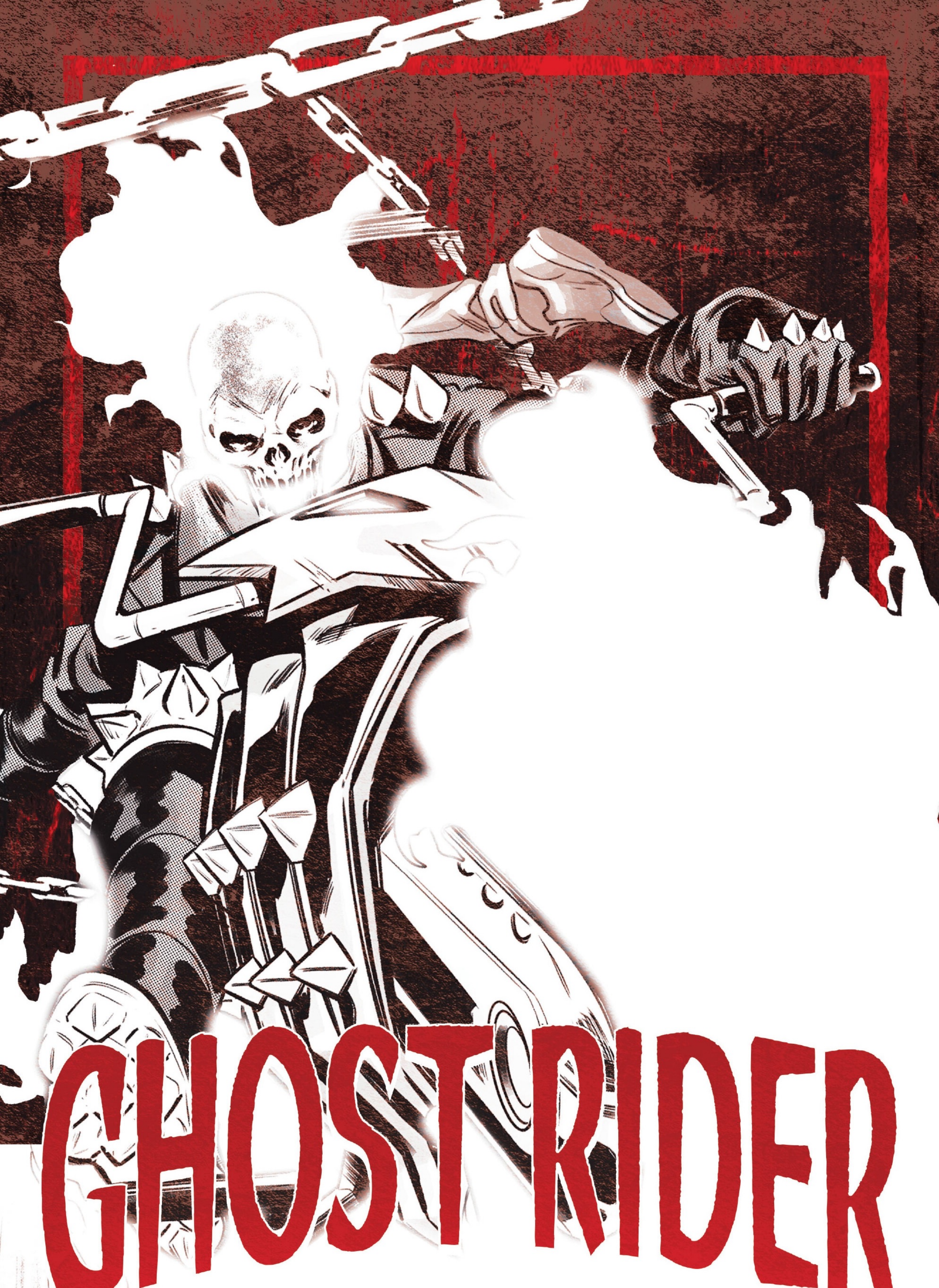
"Embracing horror." – The Comic Book Dispatch

GHOST RIDER

RITE OF PASSAGE

PERCY
NIETO
VALENZA

MARVEL



GHOST RIDER

RITE OF PASSAGE

PREVIOUSLY...

Talia Warroad was a former S.H.I.E.L.D. and F.B.I. agent with an expertise in the occult and the supernatural. When she was assigned to hunt down the Ghost Rider, Warroad discovered demonic influences across the country and was forced to team up with her original target. Eventually, this led to a romantic relationship with the Rider's human host, Johnny Blaze!

Her magic and knowledge of the occult, not to mention her unflinching confidence, have made her an invaluable ally for Blaze, as they've charted the dark highways of America.

But who is Talia Warroad exactly? And what secrets has she kept from the Ghost Rider?

When innocent blood is spilled, a *Spirit of Vengeance* is born, and **JOHNNY BLAZE** finds himself transformed!

Marvel Comics presents. . .

GHOST RIDER

Rite of Passage

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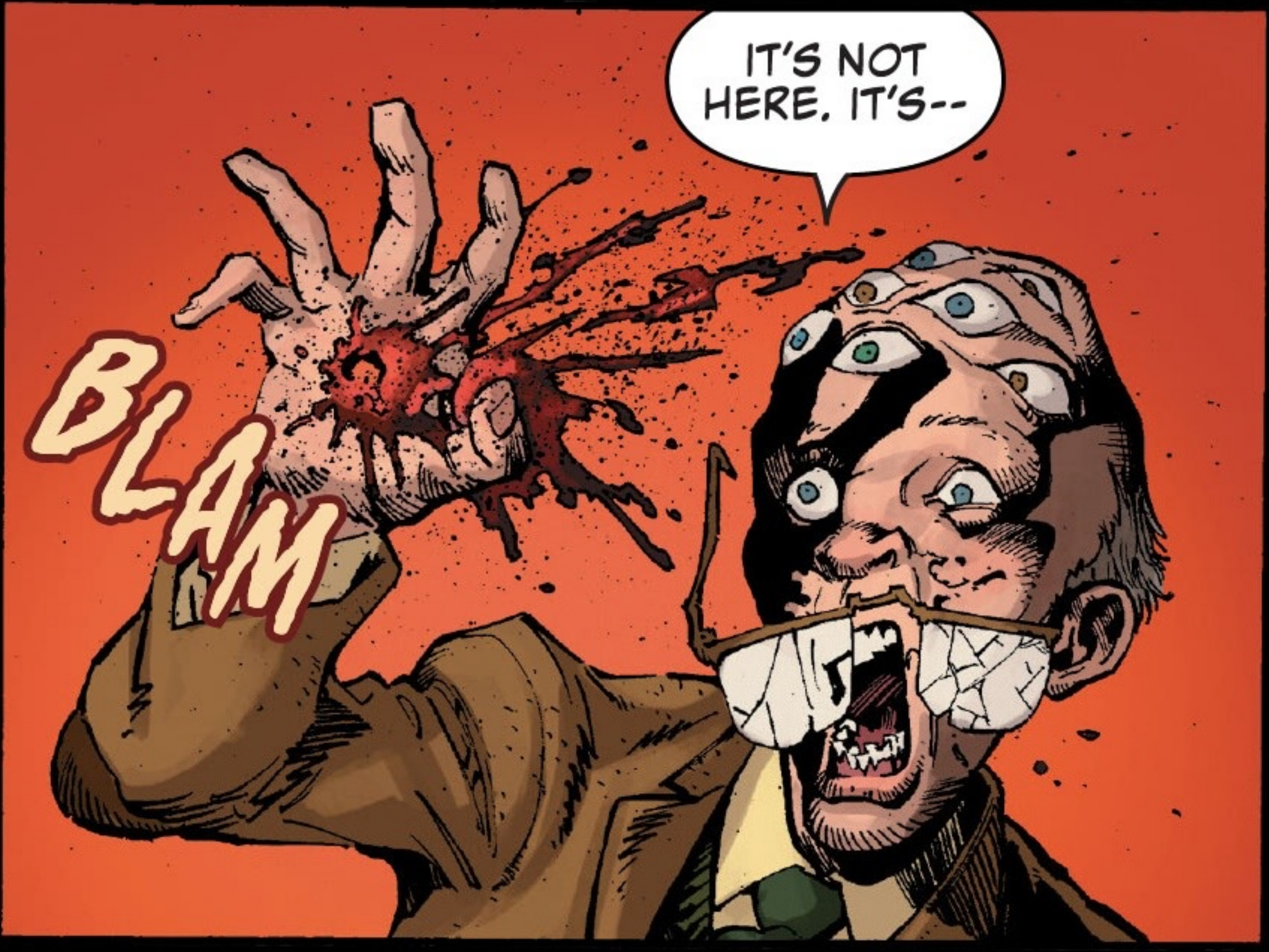
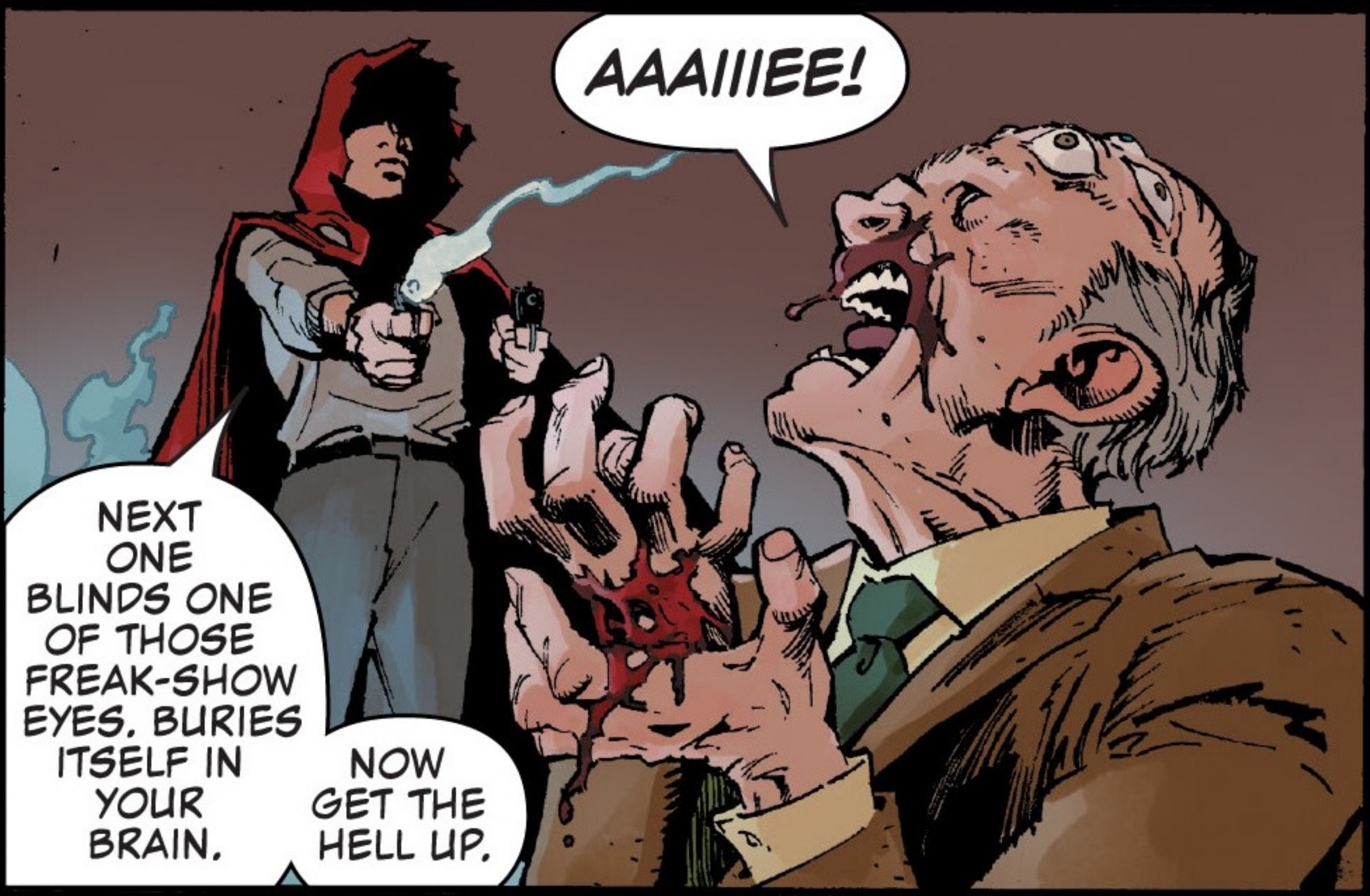
ANNUAL

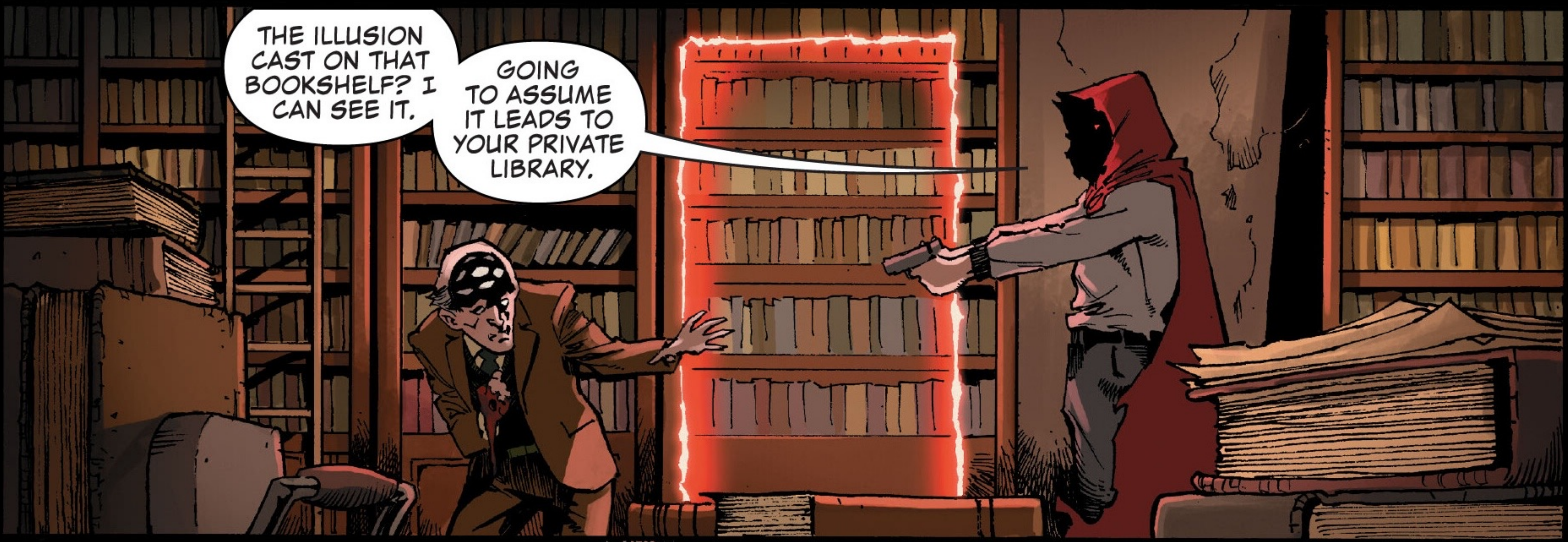
"Halloween Spirit"

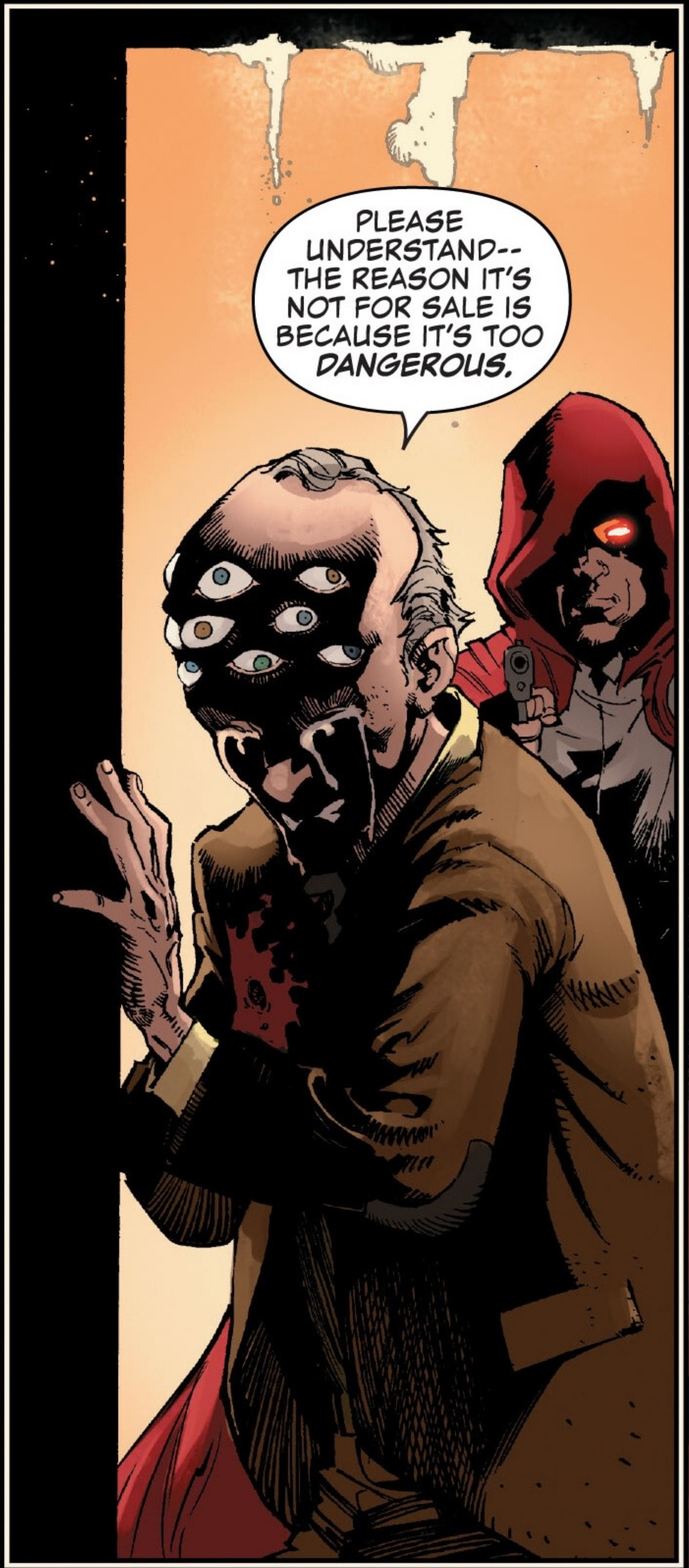
AN HOUR AGO.
THERE'S A REASON YOUR SENSES ARE HEIGHTENED ON HALLOWEEN...
Micawber's Books Purveyors of New and Very Ancient
...WHEN YOU CAN SMELL THE SPICE OF BURNING LEAVES...
SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS.
...AND THE AIR FEELS BRITTLE...
...AND EVERYTHING'S VIVIDLY COLORED.
THERE'S AN ENERGY YOU'RE TAPPED INTO.
A DARK ENERGY.
THE SPIRIT OF SAMHAIN.
OPEN
CLOSED
AND NOWHERE IS IT MORE POWERFUL THAN SALEM.

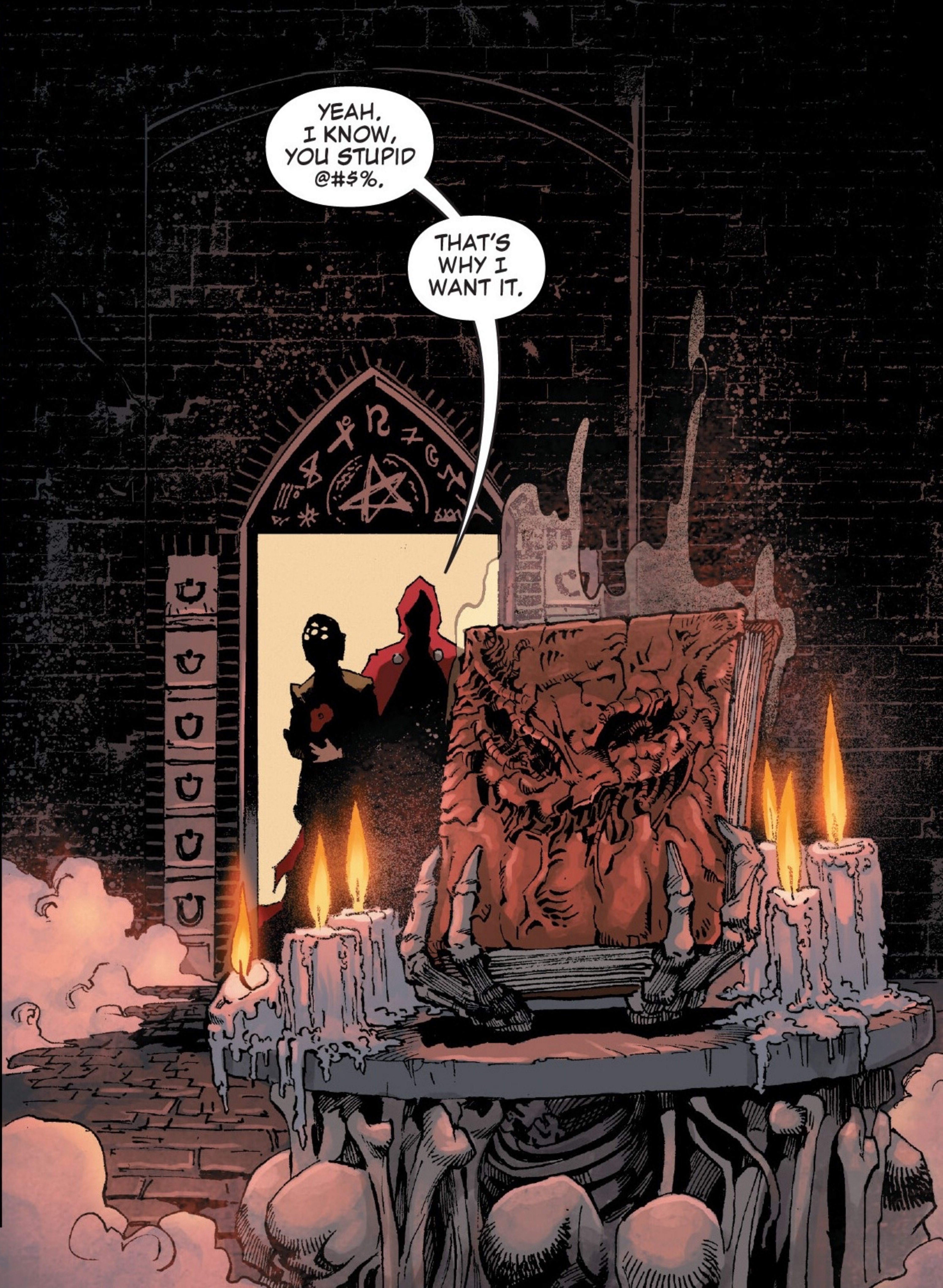
CAN I HELP YOU FIND SOMETHING?
MATTER OF FACT, JACOB, YOU CAN.
I CALLED. ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS. WANTING TO BUY ONE #$%&@ TITLE FROM YOUR #$%&@ COLLECTION.
KRAK
YOU REFUSED TO SELL IT. SO I'M GOING TO TAKE IT.
NO...
NO, MR. ROBBINS, I WON'T GIVE IT TO YOU.
YOU DON'T SAY NO TO THE HOOD!


IT'S NOT HERE. IT'S--
BLAM


AAAIIIEE!
NEXT ONE BLINDS ONE OF THOSE FREAK-SHOW EYES. BURIES ITSELF IN YOUR BRAIN.
NOW GET THE HELL UP.


THE ILLUSION CAST ON THAT BOOKSHELF? I CAN SEE IT.
GOING TO ASSUME IT LEADS TO YOUR PRIVATE LIBRARY.


PLEASE UNDERSTAND-- THE REASON IT'S NOT FOR SALE IS BECAUSE IT'S TOO *DANGEROUS.*


YEAH, I KNOW, YOU STUPID @#$%.
THAT'S WHY I WANT IT.

THERE WE GO. THAT WASN'T SO HARD, SEE?
YOU DIDN'T EVEN HAVE TO DIE.
YET.
BUT THERE'S A LONG NIGHT AHEAD OF US.
WHO KNOWS WHAT COULD HAPPEN, YEAH?
I'VE BEEN GONE-- GONE TO A DARK @#$%#& PLACE FOR A LONG @#$%#& WHILE...
...AND I'M READY TO MAKE UP FOR SOME LOST TIME.
EARN SOME DOLLARS AND BLOOD.
Hallow Gospels
THIS BOOK IS GOING TO BE THE STORY OF MY COMEBACK.

OF ALL THE MONTHS, OCTOBER IS THE HOLIEST OF THEM ALL FOR THE DARKNESS...
...AND HALLOWEEN, SAMHAIN, IS ITS CRESCENDO.
THE SPIRIT OF HALLOWEEN IS AN ENTITY THAT LIVES BENEATH OUR WORLD.
IF YOU WANT TO TAP INTO ITS ENERGY...
...OR OUTRIGHT SUMMON IT...
CLOSED
...ITS SPIRIT IS STRONGEST TONIGHT.

MOTEL The Dead Tired Inn
EVERY DAY IS HALLOWEEN...
...IF YOU'RE LIVING YOUR BEST LIFE.
GOING TO LEAVE CANDY FOR THE KIDS?
ONLY THE ONES WITH ARSENIC AND RAZOR BLADES IN THEM.
WHAT DO YOU THINK?
LITTLE TOO ON THE NOSE?
TALIA?
TALIA!
CHHHHHHHHHH

WHAT'S HAPPENING?
HKK!!!
SOMETHING'S... WRONG.
REALLY, REALLY WRONG.
THE RIDER FEELS IT TOO...
...THERE'S EVIL IN THE AIR.
NOK NOK
NOK NOK
NO...
NOK NOK
KRNSH

WHEN I KNOCK, YOU ANSWER.
YOU--
NO!
STOP. PLEASE.
WHO THE @#$% IS THIS?
HER NAME'S ELSA BLOODSTONE. COMES FROM A LONG LINE OF MONSTER HUNTERS.
I JUST FELT A MAGICAL DISTURBANCE THAT KNOCKED ME FLAT. I'M TALKING ABOUT THE EQUIVALENT OF A TEN ON THE RICHTER SCALE.
IF THIS #$&% IS TO BLAME--
I'M NOT TO BLAME, AND WE NEED TO HURRY.
OR THIS WILL BE THE LAST HALLOWEEN.

THIS IS SOME SERIOUS @#$%, ELSA. YOU SURE WE SHOULDN'T CALL IN DOCTOR STRANGE?
HE'S UNAVAILABLE. YOU DIDN'T THINK TWO UNWASHED DRIFTERS WERE THE *FIRST* ONES ON MY LIST, DID YOU?
THANKS FOR THINKING OF US. AND @#$% YOU WHILE WE'RE AT IT.
THERE'S BEEN A SPIKE IN SUPERNATURAL ACTIVITY THE PAST FEW YEARS.
YOUR STANDARDS ARE A BIT RAW AND DIRTY, BUT YOU'VE DONE ALL RIGHT FIGHTING IT. THAT'S HOW YOU ENDED UP ON MY RADAR.
THAT'S ALSO HOW I CAME TO LEARN ABOUT THE *HALLOW GOSPELS.*
WHOEVER CONTROLS THE BOOK CONTROLS THE POWER THAT POURS OUT OF IT.
YOU CAN THINK OF IT LIKE A BATTERY, OR YOU CAN THINK OF IT LIKE A GATE, BUT...IT'S NOW FOUND ITS NEXUS IN SALEM.
THAT'S NOT GOING TO STAY CONTAINED, IS IT?
NO...IT'S INCUBATING.
HOW LONG UNTIL THE DAM BREAKS AND THIS #$%& GOES POURING OUT INTO THE WORLD?
BEFORE THIS NIGHT ENDS.
SHOULD SHE BE DOING THAT?
YES. SHE SHOULD.
URK!

@#$%, THAT HURTS!
SLIKK
STAY BACK.
THE @#$% ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? SHE NEEDS OUR HELP!
ANYBODY WHO STEPS INSIDE THIS PERIMETER WILL BE INFECTED BY THE HALLOWEEN SPIRIT.
YOU'RE ALREADY SCARY ENOUGH ON THE INSIDE. YOU DON'T NEED ANY ADDITIONAL... FLAVORING.
TERGEO.
BESIDES...
...SHE DOESN'T NEED ANYONE'S HELP.
YOU SEE?
SHE'S PERFECTLY CAPABLE OF TAKING CARE OF HERSELF.
YOU SAYING THAT WITH A SMILE, @#$%?

YOU'RE THE ONE WHO MADE THE DECISION TO TEST THE PERIMETER.
YOU DIDN'T EXACTLY DISCOURAGE IT.
SOMEBODY HAD TO DO IT.
SO I'M THE CHUM YOU THROW TO THE SHARKS?
NO. YOU'RE THE CAGE THAT PROTECTS US FROM THEIR JAWS.
WHATEVER SPELL YOU CLEANSED YOURSELF WITH...
...DOSE US UP.
GIVE US A **SHIELD** TO SURVIVE THIS.

JOHNNY? GIVE ME AN UPDATE ON THE RIDER?
HE'S WITH ME, BUT HE'S HOLDING BACK.
FEELS LIKE HE'S FLARING JUST BENEATH MY SKIN, IF THAT MAKES SENSE.
WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?
THEM.
THEY'RE THE PROBLEM.

THEY'RE MONSTERS.
BUT THEY'RE *PEOPLE.*
KROOM
WE CAN'T KILL THEM.
BUT WE CAN HURT THE DEVIL *OUT* OF THEM.
WHERE DID THAT CHAIN COME FROM?
IT'S LIKE THE RIDER'S GIVING ME JUST ENOUGH OF HIM...
...TO GET TO THE *REAL* ENEMY.
SZZL

CHOOOOM
THEY'LL LIVE.
IF EVERYBODY'S WEARING A COSTUME ON HALLOWEEN, THEN HOW DO WE FIND THE REAL--
--MONSTERS?!

KRAK
NO!
DOOM
DOOM
REEEE!
#$%@.

TALIA!
-HUFF-
THIS THING'S LOADED WITH BUCKSHOT...
...BUT I'M GONNA LACE IT WITH HELLFIRE.
FWOOSH
THOOOM

I THOUGHT WE WEREN'T SUPPOSED TO KILL THEM.
HE WAS NO INNOCENT.
LET ME SEARCH YOUR SOUL.
SHARE YOUR SINS.
WHAT DID YOU LEARN?
JOHNNY?

HE CAME BACK.
WHO CAME BACK?
HE WAS IN A DARK PLACE, BUT HE CAME BACK STRONGER.
PARKER ROBBINS. *THE HOOD.*
IT IS CLEAR NOW THAT THIS IS BEYOND JOHNNY'S ABILITIES OR YOURS.
HALLOWEEN IS A NIGHT FOR MONSTERS.

HRRN...
GOOD...
...YOU'RE AWAKE.
NEED SOMETHING FROM YOU.
SKINCH
YOU SEE...
SKELCH
AIIEEEEE!
...THE END OF THE HALLOW GOSPELS-- ⇒MUNCH⇐ --IS A BUNCH OF BLANK PAGES.
I'M SUPPOSED TO SPIKE THE FEAR AND TASTE THE FLESH OF MY SACRIFICE.
I DON'T KNOW $#&@ ABOUT $#&@ WHEN IT COMES TO THESE FANCY-ASS SPELLS...
...BUT I DO LOVE BRINGING THE PAIN.

YOU WANT THE POWER?
YOU'VE GOT TO AUTHOR THE FUTURE...
...IN *BLOOD*, BABY.
MUST FEEL GOOD, JACOB, YEAH?
TO KNOW THAT AFTER ALL THESE YEARS AS A @#%& BOOKWORM...
...YOU'RE FINALLY PART OF THE STORY!
SACRIFICE

CHK
FWOOSH
VROOOOM
SAVE TALIA WARROAD.
ME?
THEN WHAT ARE *YOU* GOING TO--?
SCREEEEE

A SUMMONING SPELL HAS BEGUN.
THE HALLOWEEN SPIRIT IS BEGINNING TO MANIFEST.
WHILE YOU DEAL WITH THE FLESH-AND-BLOOD MORTALS...
...I'LL BE BUSY GETTING INTO *THE SPIRIT.*

526
CLOSED
BLAM
BLAM BLAM
BLAM BLAM
BLAM BLAM BLAM

KRINCH
ANYBODY HERE?
CLOSED
I'M LOOKING FOR THE HORROR SECTION.
THUNK
HASSSS
@#$%!!!
SHOOOM

SOMEONE'S HERE.
TAKE CARE OF HER...
...WHILE I FINISH WHAT I STARTED.
THE @#$&% WHO BANISHED ME ALL THIS TIME?*
THEY'RE ABOUT TO GET THEIR ASSES PUNISHED.
*SEE MARY JANE & BLACK CAT: BEYOND #1! --DS
EVERY DAY'S GONNA BE HALLOWEEN.
YOU'VE MADE SOME NEW ENEMIES NOW, YOU @#$%@.
GO BACK TO WHERE YOU CAME FROM.

THE RIDER MUST FEEL LIKE SOMEONE TRYING TO PLUG AN OIL GEYSER...
...WITH THEIR BARE HANDS.
THIS SPIRIT IS BUILT OUT OF THOUSANDS OF YEARS OF FEAR AND DARKNESS...
...THAT HAVE BEEN FESTERING, READY TO EXPLODE INTO THE WORLD.
WITHOUT THE RIDER HOLDING ON AND WRESTLING IT BACK, IT WOULD HAVE ALREADY TAKEN OUT HALF THE EASTERN SEABOARD.

ELSA AND TALIA NEED TO CUT OFF ITS SOURCE OF POWER...
...BEFORE THE RIDER LOSES HIS GRIP.
BLAM
CHOOOM
TALIA--?!
THE BOOK.
CLOSE IT!

BLAM BLAM
BLAM BLAM
BLAM
GOTCHA.

IT'S STRONGER THAN THE RIDER.
JUST WHEN I THINK WE'RE FINISHED...
...THE HALLOWEEN SPIRIT GOES TO SMOKE...
...LIKE SOMEBODY'S SNUFFED OUT THE CANDLE IN A PUMPKIN.

LATER...
EVERYTHING'S BACK TO NORMAL. NORMAL AS THINGS GET IN A TOWN LIKE SALEM ANYWAY.
BUT I IMAGINE EVERYBODY'S SUFFERING FROM A HELL OF A HALLOWEEN HANGOVER.
I CAN TELL YOU THIS BOOK WILL NO LONGER BE A THREAT.
I'LL BE LOCKING IT UP IN A SEALED VAULT BELOW MY ESTATE.
CAN'T SAY THE SAME OF THE HOOD.
DON'T KNOW WHERE HE'S BEEN. DON'T KNOW WHERE HE'S GONE...
...BUT I FEEL LIKE I KEEP SEEING HIM OUT OF THE CORNER OF MY EYE...
...LIKE AN UGLY SHADOW THAT'S FOLLOWING US.

NUMBER EIGHTEEN

"Bad Education"

I'VE NEVER BEEN ABLE TO SLEEP.
WHEN I CLOSE MY EYES, THE SHADOWS INSIDE ARE AS BUSY AS THE SHADOWS OUTSIDE.
I SEE THINGS OTHERS DON'T.
3:33
SOME OF THEM CAN'T HURT YOU.
LIKE THIS THING IN THE CORNER.
IT'S MORE OF A STAIN.
I CAN WIPE IT AWAY.

THE PAST.
BOSTON.
TALIA
WHEN I WAS YOUNGER...
...I DIDN'T KNOW I HAD THAT KIND OF POWER.
SO I WAS ALWAYS SCARED.
MOMMY! DADDY!
WHEN I TOLD MY PARENTS ABOUT THE STAIN ON THE CEILING...
...THEY TOLD ME TO LOOK AGAIN.
THE STAIN WAS A BUNNY, MY MOTHER SAID, AND BUNNIES WEREN'T SCARY.
BUT I KNEW BETTER.

THINGS WEREN'T ANY BETTER DURING THE DAY.
NOT JUST BECAUSE I SAW SHADOWS EVERYWHERE, ALWAYS...
...BUT ALSO BECAUSE EVERYONE KNEW I WAS DIFFERENT, SO THEY TREATED ME DIFFERENT.
TALIA?
THIS IS THE *THIRD* TIME I'VE ASKED.
DO YOU HAVE TO GO TO THE--
--BATHROOM?

EVERY DAY, ALL DAY, I TRIED TO HOLD IT.
YOU SHOULD BE ASHAMED!
YOU'RE TOO OLD FOR THIS, TALIA!
BECAUSE I DIDN'T WANT TO GO IN *THERE.*
STUPID BRAT...
SOMETHING LIVED IN ONE OF THE STALLS.
SOMETHING ONLY I COULD SEE.
IT WASN'T A STAIN OR AN ECHO EITHER.
THIS ONE COULD *HURT.*
AAAIIIEEEE!
WHAT DID YOU DO TO YOURSELF?!

THAT NIGHT, I DIDN'T FEEL SCARED.
I FELT *ANGRY.*
THE RAGE TURNED OVER INSIDE ME LIKE A SNARLING DOG.
AND THE STAIN ON THE CEILING SEEMED TO HEAR ME.
IT GAVE ME THE ANSWER I WANTED.

THE NEXT DAY, MY PARENTS SAID I SHOULD STAY HOME FROM SCHOOL...
...BUT I INSISTED ON GOING.
THIS IS FOR YOU.
MATH
THANK YOU, TALIA...
ALL RIGHT, EVERYONE...
...IT'S TIME FOR OUR MATH LESSON AND-- URK!
-GASP-
EWWW!
OH...
OH NO.
WHAT DID YOU DO TO ME, YOU LITTLE @#$%?!

PRESENT DAY.
TALIA?
TALIA, ARE YOU EVEN LISTENING TO ME?
DINER
SORRY, JOHNNY.
WHAT IS IT? WHAT DO YOU SEE?
IT'S NOTHING.
I'M THINKING WE HEAD NORTH AT THE SPLIT.
SOUND GOOD?
HOLD ON A SEC...
...THIS CURVE IS DANGEROUS.

THE WEIRDER THINGS GOT WITH ME, THE MORE MY PARENTS PUSHED BACK.
BUT BY THE TIME I WAS A TEENAGER, I WAS DONE PRETENDING TO BE ANY SORT OF NORMAL.
APPY BIRTHDA
I WAS STILL AFRAID...
DOLL GIRL
...BUT I WAS ALSO ANGRY...
...BECAUSE I DIDN'T THINK ANYONE UNDERSTOOD ME.
ATM
UNTIL I MET *HIM*.

STEFAN SKAAR.
WOOO!
LET'S MAKE SOME MONEY.
TSSSSS
PERFLUO.
ATM
THERE WE GO!
VRRRR
HOW DID YOU DO THAT?
DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT, GIRLIE.
ONE TIME... I DREAMED OF A SYMBOL LIKE THAT.
I WROTE IT DOWN ON A PIECE OF PAPER AND GAVE IT TO MY TEACHER, AND SHE PISSED HERSELF IN THE MIDDLE OF CLASS.

I ASKED HIM TO TEACH ME.
HE SAID IT WASN'T JUST A MATTER OF READING A BOOK OR LEARNING EQUATIONS.
BEER 30PACK
PIZZA
ONLY A FEW, RARE PEOPLE ARE PLUGGED INTO THE DARKNESS.
EVEN IF YOU'RE ONE OF THEM...
...YOU MIGHT NOT BE ABLE TO MANAGE IT WITHOUT GOING CRAZY OR GETTING SICK.
PLEASE. I'M READY. I'M--
EVERYBODY GET YOUR HANDS UP.

DON'T RUN! DON'T MOVE AT ALL!
WE'RE JUST ENJOYING A LITTLE PICNIC ON THE BEACH, OFFICER.
DON'T FEED ME THAT @#$%. WE HAVE SURVEILLANCE FOOTAGE FROM THE ATM YOU HIT.
PIZZA
I'M SORRY, OFFICER, BUT I CAN'T HEAR YOU OVER THE SCREAMS.
YOUR *EYES*--THEY'RE SCREAMING...
THEY'RE SCREAMING AND FULL OF TEETH.
STEFAN...?
WHEW! WHAT WAS THAT?
WHAT IN THE LIVING HELL JUST HAPPENED?

YOU'VE GOT YOUR WHOLE FUTURE AHEAD OF YOU, KID.
YOU SHOULDN'T BE HANGING OUT WITH FREAKS LIKE THAT.
YOU HEARING ME?
Pay ME A VISIT
666
ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS
I COULD GET YOU TOSSED IN JUVIE FOR WHAT HAPPENED TONIGHT.
BUT YOUR PARENTS ASSURE ME THEY'RE GOING TO COME DOWN HARD ON YOU. ISN'T THAT RIGHT?
WE'RE SO SORRY AND SO EMBARRASSED ABOUT THIS.
EMBARRASSED?
YOU'RE *EMBARRASSED?*

WELL, YOU KNOW WHAT I AM?
I'M @#$% ANGRY!

GREENWICH VILLAGE, NEW YORK CITY.
THE SANCTUM SANCTORUM.
YOU UNDERSTAND, MR. AND MRS. WARROAD, THAT I'M VERY BUSY.
YES. OF COURSE. WE'RE VERY GRATEFUL FOR YOUR TIME...
WOULD YOU LIKE SOME TEA?
I'D RATHER DRINK RAT BLOOD.
...DOCTOR STRANGE.
I'M APPROACHED DAILY WITH EVERY VARIETY OF NONSENSE.
SOMEONE THINKS THEY'RE PSYCHIC BECAUSE THEY DREAMED OF TRAINS--
--AND THE NEXT DAY, THERE WAS A RAIL ACCIDENT IN BANGLADESH.
SOMEONE THINKS THEIR CAT IS A MALEVOLENT FORCE BECAUSE WHEN IT MEOWS, IT SOUNDS LIKE IT'S SPEAKING LATIN.
FOOMP
XVIII
IT'S ALL RATHER TIRESOME.

BUT YOUR PARENTS SAID SOMETHING THAT CAUGHT MY ATTENTION...
...SO I'M INDULGING THIS VISIT, TALIA WARROAD.
WHAT PART DID THEY TELL YOU?
THAT I HEAR VOICES IN MY HEAD? THAT I SEE DEAD THINGS EVERYWHERE? THAT I CAN DRAW DESIGNS THAT HURT PEOPLE?
OR THAT I HATE THEM? DID THEY TELL YOU I HATE THEM?
AND I DON'T WANT TO TALK TO A @#$% THERAPIST!
IS THAT WHAT YOU THINK I AM?
THEY... SAID YOU COULD HELP ME.
I ASSUMED--
YOU ASSUMED WRONG.

THE @#$%?
UKK--
TALIA!
I ASSURE YOU SHE'S SAFE.
I'M AFRAID I DON'T HAVE THE TIME OR PATIENCE TO INTERVIEW A SULLEN TEENAGER.
THIS METHOD IS AGGRESSIVE BUT EFFICIENT.
HUK UK!
FASCINATING.

TALIA!
DEAR GOD...IS SHE OKAY?
PLEASE! PLEASE TELL US YOU CAN CURE HER!
CURE HER?
THERE'S NO CURE FOR THIS SORT OF THING.
BUT I CAN TEACH HER.
@#$% OFF!
VISIT

TALIA!!!
WHERE DID SHE GO?!
I...DON'T KNOW...
"...BUT I SMELL SULFUR AND BRIMSTONE."
WAS HOPING YOU'D CALL.
THINK WE MIGHT HAVE A LOT IN COMMON.
WHAT DO YOU SAY?
THAT WAS THE SUMMER I TURNED 13.
THAT WAS THE MOMENT EVERYTHING CHANGED.

PRESENT DAY.
ColmeGas
ColmeGas
2
ColmeGas
1
ColmeGas
Al's MART
GRAB ME A COFFEE, WOULD YOU?
DIESEL OR UNLEADED?
FUNNY...
WITH THE GAS, THAT'S $49.00 EVEN.
IT'S TIME FOR CHANGE.
666
666
WHAT DID YOU SAY?
I SAID HERE'S YOUR CHANGE.

I THOUGHT I HAD LEFT ALL THAT TROUBLE BEHIND ME.
BUT THERE'S SOMETHING *FAMILIAR* IN THE AIR, A SMELL LIKE SULFUR AND BRIMSTONE...
...AND BLOOD.
ColmeGas
1
EVERYTHING OKAY?
NO.
NO, I DON'T THINK SO.
THE *CULT OF MEPHISTO* IS BACK, AND MY ROLE IN IT ISN'T FINISHED.

NUMBER NINETEEN

"Rite of Passage"

HOW'S THIS FOR A CROSSROADS, TALIA?
THIS'LL DO.
OKAY...GET OVER HERE, JOHNNY.
BUT DON'T STEP ON ANY OF THE CHALK LINES.
WHAT SHOULD I DO?
YOU? NOTHING.
I NEED *HIM.*

HELP ME.
HELP ME FIND THE CULT OF MEPHISTO.
YOU'RE TIED TO THE SAME CURRENTS OF DARKNESS.
WHERE DO THEY WORSHIP?
SHOW US THE WAY.

THANKS.
WHAT... ~KOFF~...
...WHAT DID YOU DO?
I TAPPED INTO THAT INTERNAL COMPASS OF YOURS.
THE RIDER USED TO HATE ME, I THINK.
BUT NOW WE'VE GOT OUR OWN THING GOING.
NOT SURE IF I'M SUPPOSED TO BE GRATEFUL OR JEALOUS OR DISTURBED.
HE'S IMPRINTED ME WITH A KIND OF DEMONIC NAVIGATION BIO-APP THAT WILL SHOW US THE WAY.
IF THE RIDER KNOWS WHERE TO GO, WHY NOT JUST SEND HIM?
BECAUSE I'VE GOT HISTORY WITH THESE #$%& PEOPLE.
THERE'S A DARK ROAD AHEAD THAT I NEED TO TRAVEL.

THE PAST. BOSTON. TALIA WARROAD'S HOME.
ALMOST AN HOUR PAST WHEN HE SAID HE'D BE HERE.
GUESS HE'S NOT COMING.
WAIT!
SLK
APOLOGIES FOR THE DELAY.
AND THE--ER--MESS.

GOOD AFTERNOON.
PLEASE. COME IN, DOCTOR STRANGE.
CAN I TAKE YOUR... CLOAK?
THE NEIGHBORS WHO WERE STARING AT ME...
...I'M GUESSING THEY LOOKED AT YOUR DAUGHTER IN MUCH THE SAME WAY.
SHE DIDN'T FIT IN, NO.
SO SHE HAD TO MAKE ANOTHER SPACE FOR HERSELF.
DID YOU KNOW YOUR HOME IS BIGGER ON THE INSIDE THAN IT IS ON THE OUTSIDE?
I'M SORRY... WHAT?
WHAT HAS TALIA BEEN UP TO IN HERE?
I WISH I COULD--
KLUD
THIS COULD BE DANGEROUS FOR YOU.

HMM.
BLOODSLAYE
WHERE IS IT?
AH, I SEE YOU CAST A RUDIMENTARY CLOAKING SPELL OVER IT.
I SUPPOSE THAT'S GOOD ENOUGH FOR PRYING PARENTS.
BUT NOT FOR ME.
PUT IT DOWN.
AND GET THE @#$% OUT OF MY ROOM!

WEST VIRGINIA.
HOW WE LOOKING, TALIA?
I'D SAY WE'RE ALMOST--
--HERE.
ROAD CLOSED
NOBODY ATTENDING A ROADBLOCK ON A MAJOR HIGHWAY.
SEEMS WEIRD.
YEAH. SEEMS *REAL* WEIRD.

JUST LIKE THE RIDER IS HIDDEN INSIDE JOHNNY...
...THERE'S A LOT OF COAL IN THESE MOUNTAINS...
...AND IT BURNS HOT AS HELL.
BURROW
A PROUD MINING TOWN
YOU'VE GOT TO DIG DEEP TO FIND IT...
PEE
ELE
...WHERE THE WRONG KIND OF THINGS CAN GET UNEARTHED.
SOMETHING UGLY IS AT WORK HERE.
K.E.R
AND THE CULT OF MEPHISTO HAS SOME HAND IN IT.

STOP! PLEASE!
IT'S THE CHILDREN, THE CHILDREN ARE--
SHK
SKELCH
TAKE HIM TO THE MINE.

"TAKE HIM TO THE PIT."
I SAID PUT IT THE @#$% DOWN!
KRINSH
KRINSH
YOU LEFT BEHIND A PROJECTION OF YOURSELF, TALIA. AS SOMEONE UNTRAINED, YOU'RE, OF COURSE, LAUGHABLY SLOPPY AND RAW.
BUT PROMISING TOO. VERY PROMISING.
WHAT IS IT YOU DON'T WANT ME TO SEE?
@#%& GO AWAY AND MIND YOUR @#%& BUSINESS.
"KILL YOUR PARENTS... AND LIVE FOREVER."
TALIA...
GET OUT OF MY LIFE!
KRSSSH

NOK NOK
DOCTOR STRANGE? IS EVERYTHING OKAY?
WE HEARD SCREAMING! WE HEARD TALIA!
I KNEW YOUR DAUGHTER WAS IN DANGER...
...BUT I DIDN'T REALIZE YOU WERE AS WELL.
REST ASSURED, I AM GOING TO DO THE BEST I CAN TO HELP.

JOHNNY'S GOT HIS GRIP ON THE HANDLEBARS...
WELL?
...BUT I'VE BEEN DRIVING THIS LEG OF OUR JOURNEY.
BECAUSE WHAT'S HAPPENING NOW IS A CONTINUATION OF WHAT WAS HAPPENING WHEN I WAS 13.
THE COMPASS SAYS WE'RE HERE.
AIEEEE!
THAK

IT'S A @#$% KID.
GET! OFF! ME!
STOP!
THAT'S HOW IT WORKED WITH ME TOO.
THEY GO AFTER YOU WHEN YOU'RE YOUNG AND STUPID AND ANGRY AND IMPRESSIONABLE.
THEY GIVE YOU A TASTE OF POWER AND FREEDOM.
LISTEN TO ME. I KNOW THERE'S A PART OF YOU, DEEP DOWN, THAT HATES YOURSELF RIGHT NOW.
I KNOW THAT BECAUSE THE SAME THING HAPPENED TO ME WHEN I WAS YOUR AGE.
WHERE IS EVERYONE? WHAT DID YOU DO?
I--I DIDN'T WANT TO. I DIDN'T.
HE TOLD US WE HAD TO.
WHO?
STEFAN.
I'M SORRY. I'M SO SORRY.
I KNOW.

THE PAST. THE NEW JERSEY TURNPIKE.
READY?
JUST REMEMBER. FULL CONFIDENCE. NO DOUBT.
NO DOUBT.
I'M ALL IN, STEFAN!
WE GO OUR OWN WAY.
SCREEEEEE
SCREEE
WE GO AGAINST THE RULES, THE LAWS, THE LANES THIS WORLD FOLLOWS LIKE SHEEP!
HONK HOOOOOOONK
NKBC-108
SCREEEP

HOOOOONK
KNSCH
SCREEEECH
CHUKAK
WAIT... WAIT, I THINK WE MIGHT HAVE JUST--
--SERIOUSLY @#$% SOMEBODY UP.

HOOOOOONK
HOOOOOONK
KRRRRK
WHAT THE @#$%, TALIA?
I TOLD YOU NOT TO DOUBT.
P-1215
THAT CAR--IT WENT THROUGH THE BARRIER. THE MAN INSIDE...
HE WAS GOING TO DIE OF A CORONARY NEXT WEEK ANYWAY.
HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT?
MAYBE I JUST MADE IT UP, BUT IT'S PROBABLY NOT FAR OFF THE MARK.
ALL OF THESE ADULTS ARE LIVING IN A DOOMED PRISON OF THEIR OWN MAKING. AND THEY WANT US TO JOIN THEM.
BUT WE KNOW THE WAY OUT.

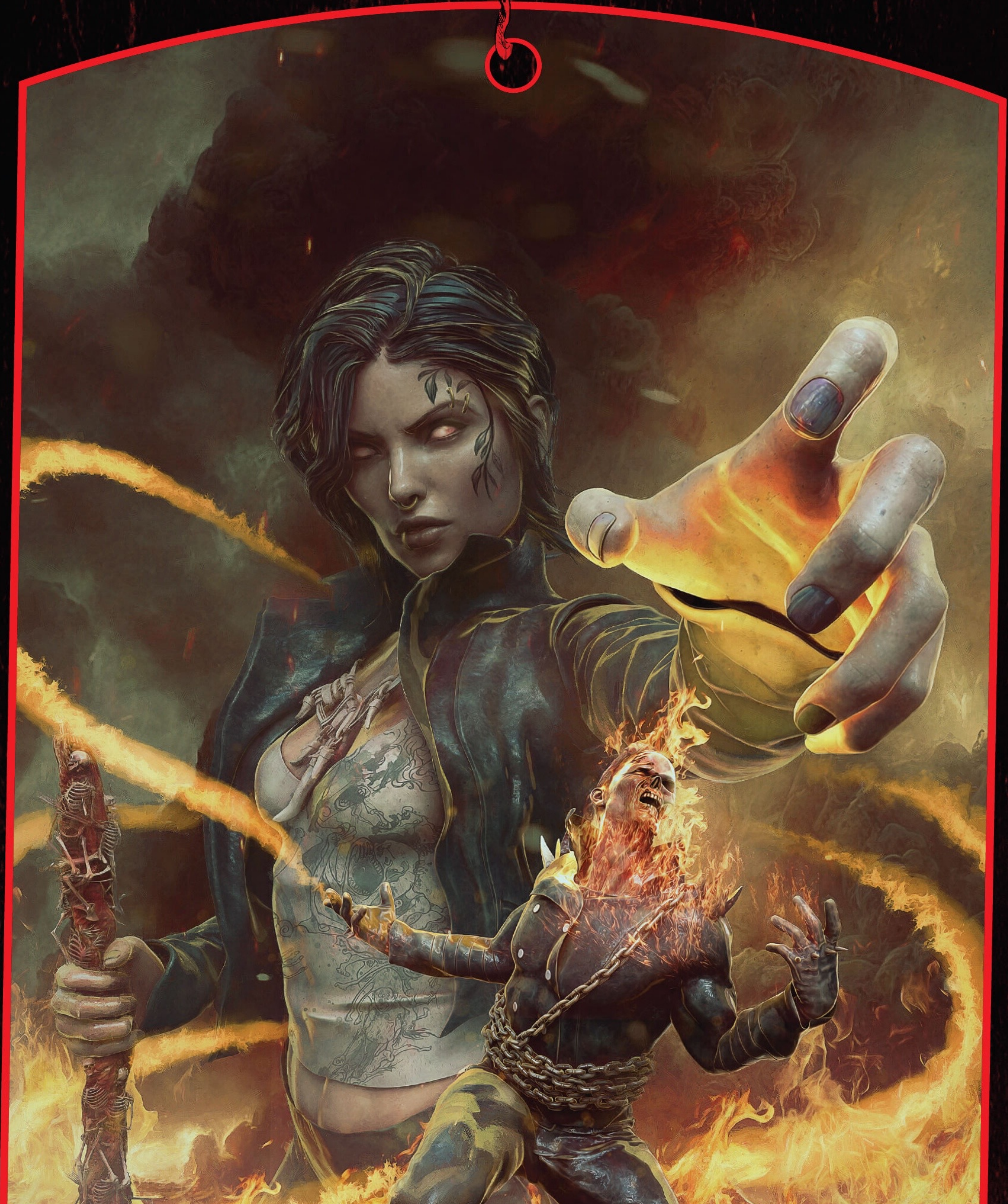
THE BOY TOLD ME THAT THE TOWN HAD BEEN SUFFERING ECONOMICALLY FOR YEARS.
THE PARENTS WERE CONSTANTLY TELLING THEIR CHILDREN THEY HAD NO FUTURE HERE.
STEFAN SHOWED UP IN BURROW...
...AND HE TOLD THEM OTHERWISE.
THEIR PARENTS WERE HOLDING THEM BACK.
THE CHILDREN COULD HAVE ANYTHING THEY WANTED.
AS LONG AS THEY FOLLOWED MEPHISTO.
AS LONG AS THEY FED THE DARKNESS.
THAT'S ENOUGH.
KILL THE OUTSIDERS!

FWOOSH
DON'T!
CAN YOU EAT THEIR SIN?
THERE IS A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CAN...
...AND SHOULD.
THEY'VE DONE TERRIBLE THINGS. BUT SO HAVE I.
THEY'RE ONLY CHILDREN!
BACK OFF!
BACK THE @#$% OFF, OR I'LL TOSS HIM.
I MEAN IT. I'LL--UFF!

SNK
I DON'T WANT YOUR HELP.
I GO TO MEPHISTO WILLINGLY.
LET'S GO, EVERYONE!
GO TOWARD THE LIGHT.
KRAKAK
RUMMM

I DON'T KNOW THAT YOU CAN CALL THIS A WIN.
RUMMMMM
A SECT WAS STOPPED BEFORE THEY COULD SUMMON A DARKNESS FROM BELOW...
KROOOMM
...BUT A TOWN WAS POISONED...
...AND NOW THESE KIDS WILL HAVE TO LIVE, LIKE I HAVE, WITH WHAT THEY'VE DONE.
KRIK KRAK
IF STEFAN IS STILL OUT THERE, SPREADING THE WORD OF THE CULT, ENLISTING MORE YOUNG FOLLOWERS...
...THEN THERE'S A LONG, DARK ROAD AHEAD OF US PAVED WITH FAMILIAR SINS.

NUMBER TWENTY



"The Kids Are All Wrong"

KIDS.
HELLISH PARK
Hellish Roller Coaster
IT WAS ALWAYS KIDS.
STEFAN WAS ENLISTING THEM ALL OVER THE COUNTRY...
...THE SAME WAY HE HAD ENLISTED ME.
KLK
Hellish Roller Coaster
SCREEEEE
I WAS 13 AT THE TIME--NO LONGER A GIRL, BUT NOT A WOMAN.
IN THAT IN-BETWEEN TIME, YOU DON'T KNOW WHO YOU ARE, SO IT'S EASY TO GET LOST.
HE TURNED US AGAINST OUR PARENTS.

HE PROMISED US ETERNAL YOUTH AND TERRIBLE POWER...
CAMP ABADDON
T. 1990
CAMP ABADDON
...AS PART OF THE CULT OF MEPHISTO.
Clothing

JOHNNY AND I ALWAYS SEEM TO BE A FEW DAYS BEHIND HIM.
BUT THIS LATEST MISSION MIGHT BE THE TROUBLE THAT BRINGS US TO HIS DOORSTEP.
RUMM
THEY COME AT NIGHT.
THEY KEEP THEIR HEADLIGHTS OFF, AND THEY DON'T CLOSE THEIR DOORS.
THEY SPEAK IN WHISPERS AND STEP SOFTLY.
BECAUSE THEY DON'T WANT TO WAKE UP THE CHILD.
NO TRESPASSING
THE PARENTS HAVE SUPPOSEDLY TRIED EVERYTHING...
...FROM COUNSELING TO MEDICATION TO JUVIE.

THE CHILD IS IN TROUBLE WITH SCHOOL, WITH DRUGS, WITH SEX, WITH VANDALISM OR FIGHTING OR WHATEVER.
THIS, THEY BELIEVE, IS THEIR LAST RESORT.
A BOARDING SCHOOL THAT IS A KIND OF PRISON.
A PLACE FAR FROM HOME THAT PROMISES A NEW BEGINNING.
DON'T WORRY, KID...
...YOU'RE AMONG FRIENDS.

COLORADO.
MIDDLE OF @#$% NOWHERE.
SURE WE'RE IN THE RIGHT PLACE, TALIA?
SURE AS HELL.
BETTER CUT THE ENGINE.
WE'LL WALK FROM HERE, JOHNNY.
SO...FIRST LOVES CUT DEEP. TELL ME MORE ABOUT STEFAN.
PLEASE DON'T TELL ME YOU'RE JEALOUS.
SO JEALOUS. MY TANK IS TOPPED OFF WITH JEALOUSY.
KIDDING.
DON'T MAKE ME GUT YOU.

I JUST WANT TO KNOW WHAT WE'RE UP AGAINST.
AND WHAT *YOU'RE* UP AGAINST.
LOOK.
THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN SCHOOL FOR TROUBLED YOUTH.
PARENTS SEND THEIR KIDS HERE. KIDS THEY DON'T KNOW HOW TO DEAL WITH.
YOU DIDN'T ANSWER MY QUESTION.
I WAS DRAWN TO STEFAN FOR THE SAME REASON I'M DRAWN TO YOU, I GUESS.
MOST PEOPLE LIVE IN DENIAL OF THE DARKNESS THAT SURROUNDS THEM.
IT'S NICE TO BE AROUND SOMEONE WHO SPEAKS YOUR LANGUAGE.

THE PAST.
WHAT ABOUT THIS ONE?
ILLNESS. THAT ONE MAKES PEOPLE SICK.
AND?
AND...THE SIZE AND COLOR OF THE CIPHER DETERMINE HOW SICK THEY GET.
A SMALL YELLOW ONE--MIGHT MAKE THEM PUKE FOR A FEW HOURS.
A MEDIUM RED ONE--WILL KNOCK THEM OUT FOR DAYS WITH A 105-DEGREE FEVER.
A BIG BLACK ONE--MIGHT MAKE THEM SPROUT A FEW TUMORS.
OKAY. HERE'S ANOTHER.
DEATH.
THAT'S DEATH.
DRAW IT ON SOMEBODY'S SHIRT OR PILLOW OR WHATEVER.
AND THEY'RE DEAD.

YOU GET AN A.
-SIGH- THIS IS SO MUCH BETTER THAN GOING TO SCHOOL WITH THE NORMALS.
I'M LEARNING @#$% THAT ACTUALLY MATTERS.
WHAT'S WRONG? STEFAN?
DO YOU HEAR SOMETHING?
COME ON.
WHERE WE GOING?
TO RAISE A LITTLE HELL.
"DID YOU LOVE HIM?"

I WAS OBSESSED WITH HIM. IS THAT THE SAME THING?
HOLD UP.
I CAN SENSE SOMETHING JUST AHEAD...
A *BLOOD WALL.*
IT CAN KEEP OUT DIFFERENT TYPES OF PEOPLE, DEPENDING ON HOW YOU MANIFEST IT.
SO WHO'S IT KEEPING OUT?
US. ADULTS. OLD PEOPLE.
I'M NOT AN OLD. YOU'RE AN OLD.
ANYWAY, I'M SURE IT WON'T STOP THE RIDER. I'LL JUST FIRE UP, AND--
NO. WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THERE BEFORE WE LET THE RIDER OFF THE LEASH. HE'S TOO DANGEROUS.
THEN WHAT DO WE DO?
I GOT AN IDEA.

NOT SURE HOW I FEEL ABOUT THIS.
IT'S NOT JUST THAT WE'RE A QUARTER MILE FROM YOUR EX-BOYFRIEND'S FORTRESS...
SINCE WHEN HAVE YOU EVER TURNED ME DOWN?
...IT'S THE WHOLE IDEA OF *MAKING A BABY.*
IT'S NOT A BABY. IT'S A *MOONCHILD.*
WHEN THE MOON IS FULL, IT'S MIRRORING THE SUN.
ALL THAT HEAT MIXED WITH ALL THAT COLD, ALL THAT LIGHT MIXED WITH ALL THOSE SHADOWS, ALL THAT MAGMA MIXED WITH ALL THAT STONE...
...MAKES A DOUBLING OF OURSELVES POSSIBLE.
A REFLECTION.

SO I'LL BE YOUR MOON.
AND YOU BE MY SUN.
CHOOOM
TALIA?

"YOUR DAUGHTER IS SPECIAL, MR. AND MRS. WARROAD."

BUT SHE IS ALSO UNDER THE THRALL OF SOME VERY DARK FORCES.
THE PAST. THE WARROAD RESIDENCE.
SHE'S BEEN IN TUNE WITH THEM LONG ENOUGH THAT YOUR HOUSE HAS BEEN STAINED.
I'M NOT WORRIED ABOUT THE HOUSE, DOCTOR STRANGE.
I'M WORRIED ABOUT MY DAUGHTER. I'M WORRIED ABOUT TALIA.
BOTH SHE--AND THIS PLACE--REQUIRE CORRECTION.
A CLEANING.
-GASP!-
YOU RUINED HER LIFE WITH YOUR CONSTANT PESTERING!
NO...
YOU NEVER ACCEPTED HER FOR WHO SHE WAS!
YOU WISHED YOU HAD A DIFFERENT DAUGHTER!
NO, NO, THAT'S NOT TRUE!

YOU HATE HER, SO SHE HATES YOU!
NO, NO! PLEASE STOP!
YOU DESERVE...
GLRP
...TO DIE!
DZZZ
LET'S HURRY ALONG NOW.
WE DON'T NEED ANY MORE CONVINCING!

TRY TO ENJOY YOUR TIME AWAY.
I'LL BE IN TOUCH ABOUT WHAT I DISCOVER...
...INCLUDING TALIA'S WHEREABOUTS.
BUT THIS MIGHT TAKE SOME TIME.
THE ANGER AND EVIL OF MEPHISTO HAVE SOAKED INTO THE VERY TIMBERS OF THIS PLACE.
"I'M FEELING A LITTLE WEIRD ABOUT THIS ONE, TALIA."

AND AS A GUY WHO TURNS INTO A FLAMING SKELETON, I'VE GOT A PRETTY HIGH THRESHOLD FOR WEIRD.
WHEN I THINK OF MAKING A CHILD...I'M SORRY, BUT I THINK OF LOVE.
THIS FEELS COLD. AND MAYBE A LITTLE RECKLESS.
IT'S ALWAYS CRUEL AND RECKLESS TO MAKE A CHILD.
DO YOU REALLY BELIEVE THAT?
YEAH. I DO. LOOK AROUND.
THIS WORLD IS ONE BIG @#$%& HORROR SHOW.
BEING BORN IS A FORM OF PUNISHMENT. RAISING A CHILD IS A KIND OF TORTURE.
I SEE IT DIFFERENTLY.
I DON'T WANT TO HEAR ANY POLLYANNA BULL@#$%.
NO BULL. I GOT A LOT OF LOVE GROWING UP.
YOUR MOTHER ABANDONED YOU. YOUR FATHER DIED. CRASH DIED. THAT SOUNDS LIKE A LONG BLACK HIGHWAY OF PAIN TO ME.
YEAH, BUT THE LOVE I GOT ALONG THE WAY-- IT WAS WORTH THE PAIN.
YOU DON'T KNOW!
IF I DON'T...

"...IT'S BECAUSE YOU'VE NEVER TOLD ME."
WHERE ARE WE GOING, STEFAN?
WHEREVER THE NIGHT TAKES US.
LOOKS LIKE SOMEBODY'S IN TROUBLE.
LET'S CHECK IT OUT.
WAIT...
PD
POLICE
...I RECOGNIZE THAT CAR.

MOM! DAD!
NO!
SKIK
THOSE ARE MY PARENTS!
COME ON.
IT'S GONNA BE ALL RIGHT.
I GOT YOU.

"I DID WHAT EVERY TEENAGER DOES.
"I WISHED MY PARENTS WOULD DIE.
"BUT IN MY CASE, THEY ACTUALLY DID.
"BECAUSE OF STEFAN, YEAH. BUT ALSO BECAUSE OF ME.
"BECAUSE I FOLLOWED HIM. BECAUSE HE WANTED ME ALL TO HIMSELF."
SOME SAY THE MISTAKES YOU MAKE AS A TEENAGER ARE NECESSARY.
YOU LEARN FROM THEM.
WELL, HERE'S WHAT I'VE LEARNED...
...NEVER GIVE TOO MUCH OF A @#$% ABOUT ANYONE.
BECAUSE WE'RE ALL GOING TO END UP AS ROADKILL.
LET'S GO, BUDDY.

I'M ATTUNED TO THE MOONCHILD. I'LL SEE WHAT IT SEES.
CAN YOU FEEL WHAT IT FEELS?
IT DOESN'T *FEEL* ANYTHING ANY MORE THAN YOUR HAND DOES.
IT'S JUST AN EXTENSION OF US.
YOU GAVE IT POWER. I GIVE IT GUIDANCE.
DON'T GO GETTING SENTIMENTAL...
...WHEN THIS IS STRICTLY BUSINESS.
"WE'LL SEND IT IN TO FIGURE OUT WHAT'S GOING ON INSIDE THAT SCHOOL.
"WE'LL GET THOSE KIDS FREE OF STEFAN.
"AND THEN THE RIDER WILL BRING THE WALLS OF THE PLACE CRASHING DOWN ON HIM."

NUMBER TWENTY-ONE

"Teach Your Children Hell"

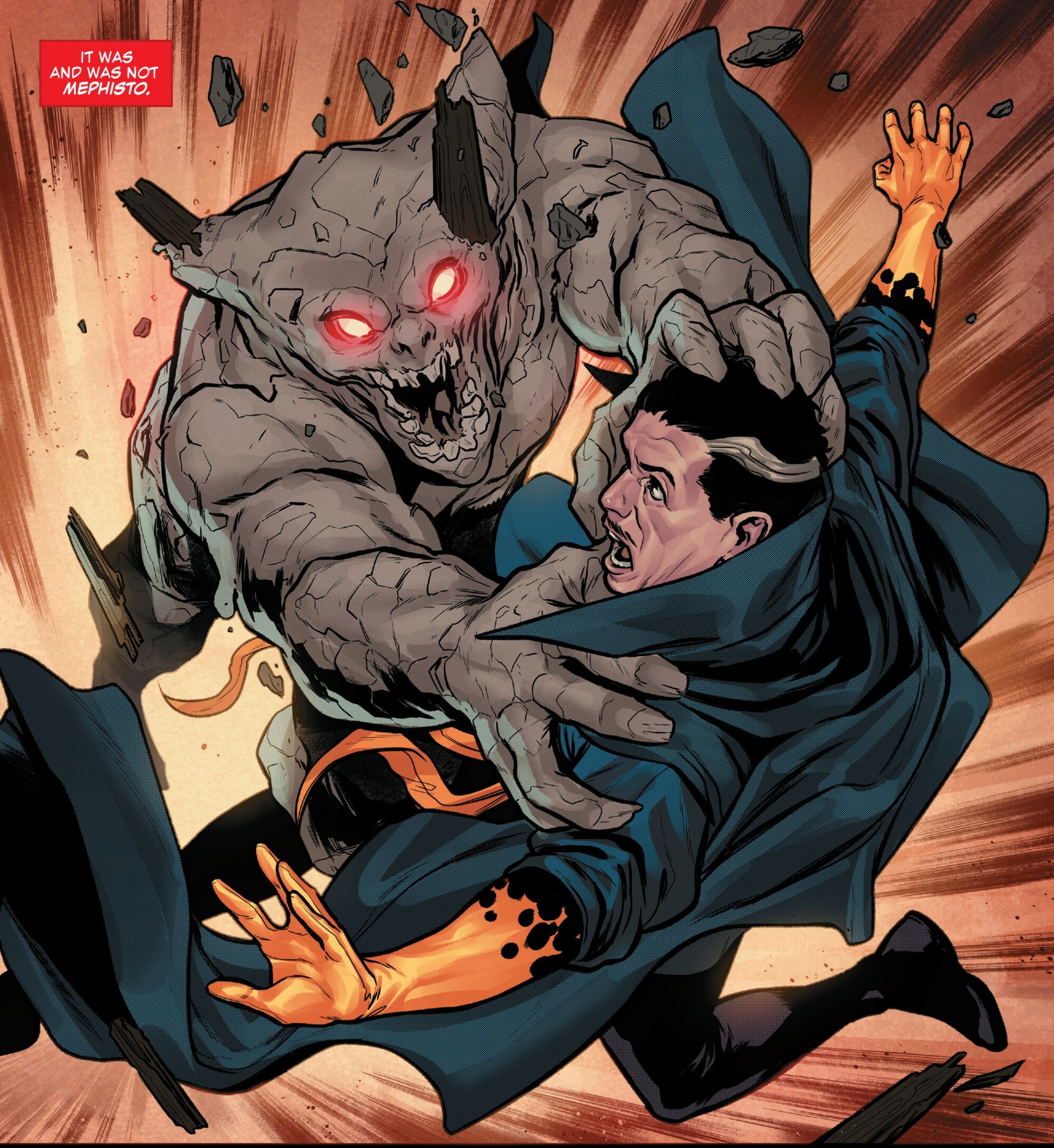
COLORADO.
WHAT DO YOU SEE, TALIA?
I SEE WHAT THE MOON-CHILD SEES, JOHNNY.
AND I FEEL WHAT IT FEELS TOO.
I'M LIKE A COLD HAND REACHING INTO THE DARKNESS BELOW A BED.
THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN SCHOOL FOR TROUBLED YOUTH
MY NERVES ARE LIKE CREEPING SPIDERS, AND MY MOUTH TASTES LIKE THE BLOOD OF A BITTEN TONGUE, AND MY SKIN IS LIKE STONE COOLED BY A DEEP RIVER.
MY BREATH IS THE AUTUMN WIND THAT CREAKS OPEN A DOOR.
I MOVE WITH THE SILENCE YOU FIND INSIDE COFFINS.

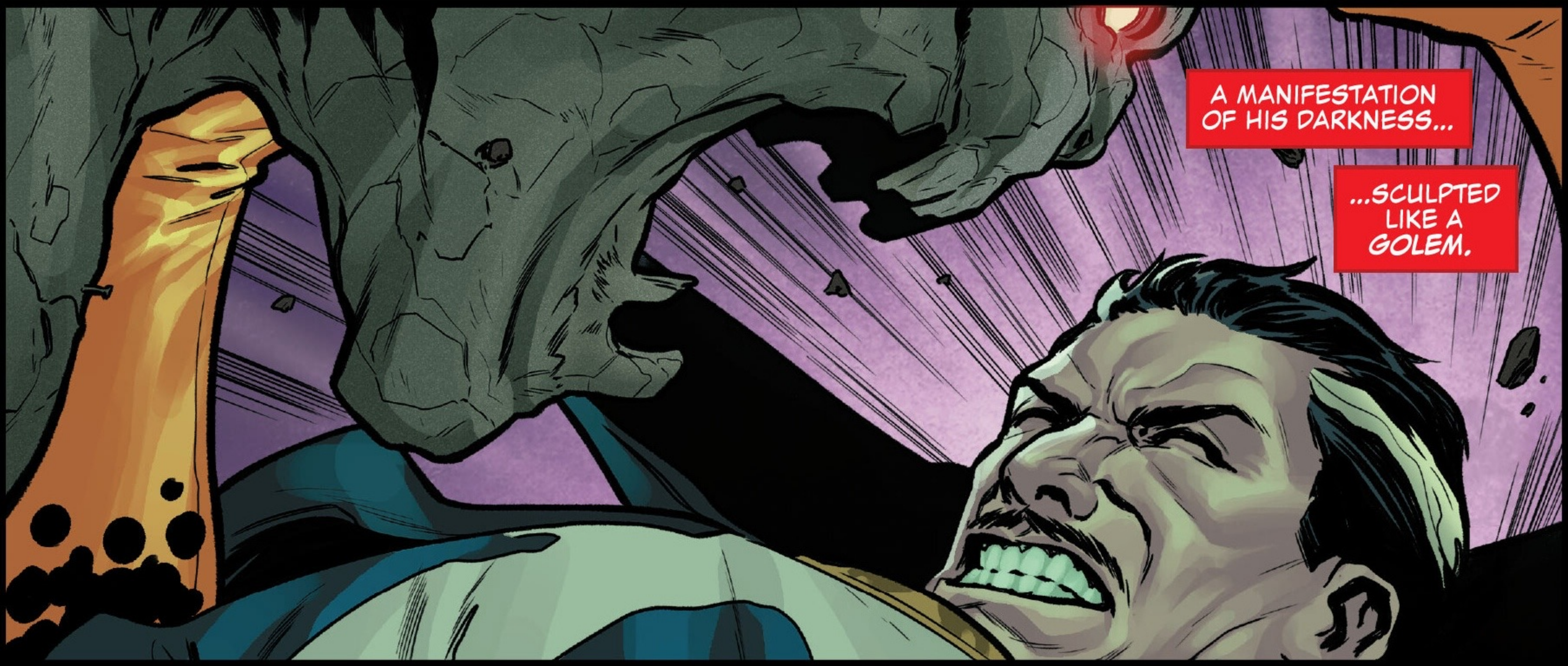
THE RIDER...
I NEED TO CONCENTRATE NOW, JOHNNY.
BUT *HE* SENSES SOMETHING.
IN THE WOODS...
@#$%.
WHAT THE HELL IS THIS?
AN OLD SPELL--CALLED A *WARDING TREE.*
THE BLOOD OF THE SACRIFICES DRIPS INTO THE ROOTS OF THE FOREST...
...AND DEMONIZES IT, MAKING IT A GUARDIAN.

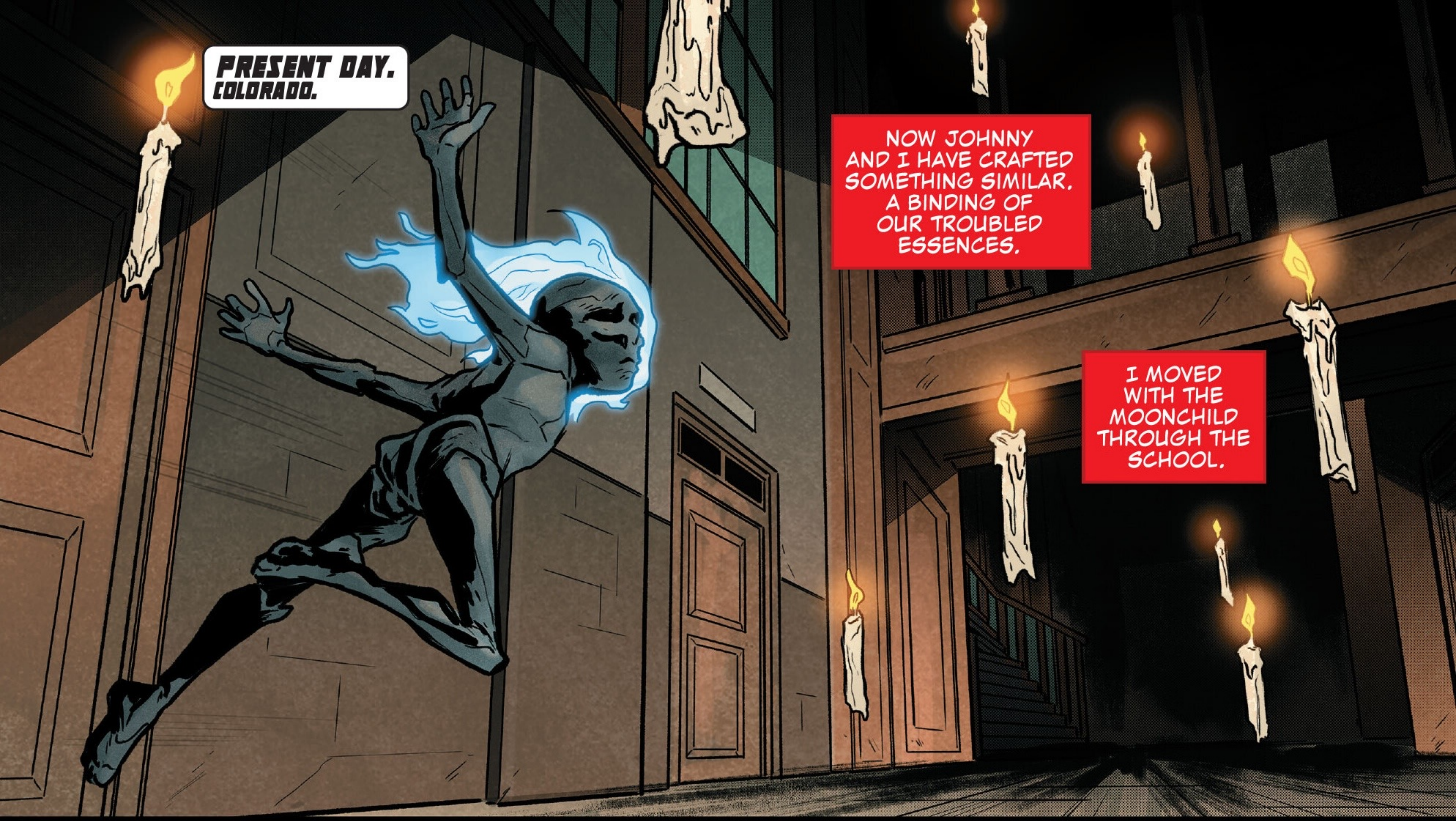
TALIA!
I'M TRYING TO @#$%#@& CONCENTRATE!
TALIA!
GLRRRK!
I SAID TO SHUT--
HARRRR!
URK!

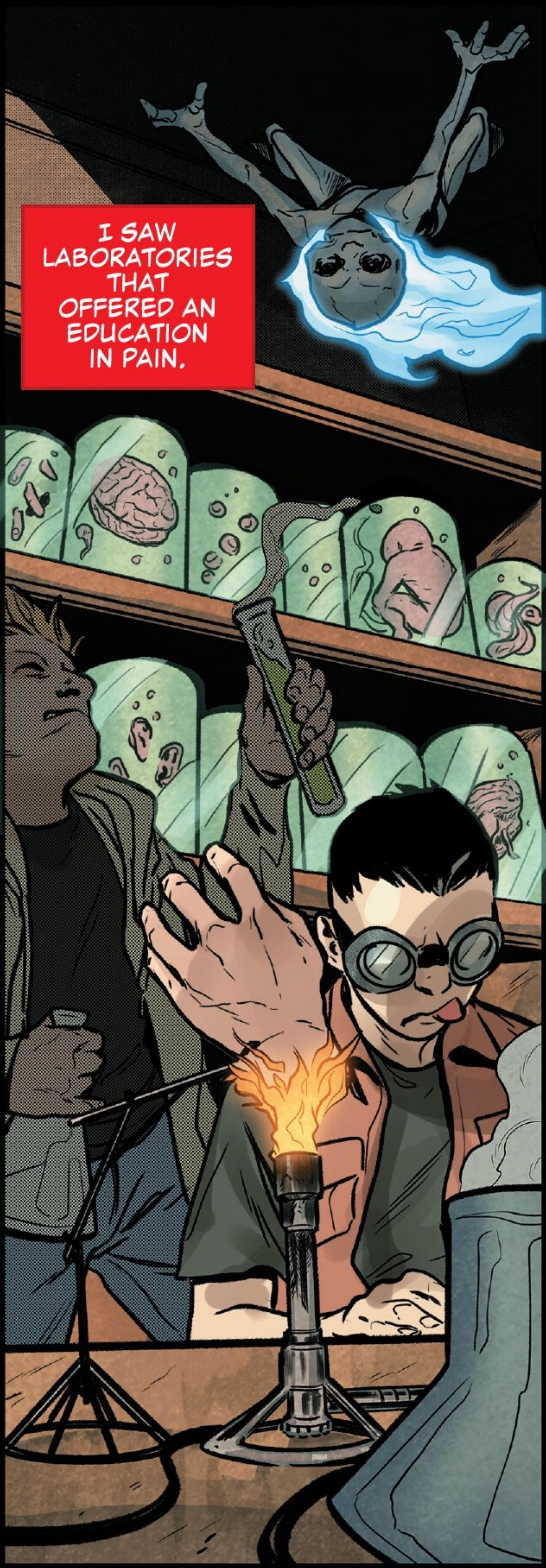
OF COURSE, THIS ISN'T THE FIRST TIME I'VE BEEN LOST IN THE WILDERNESS.

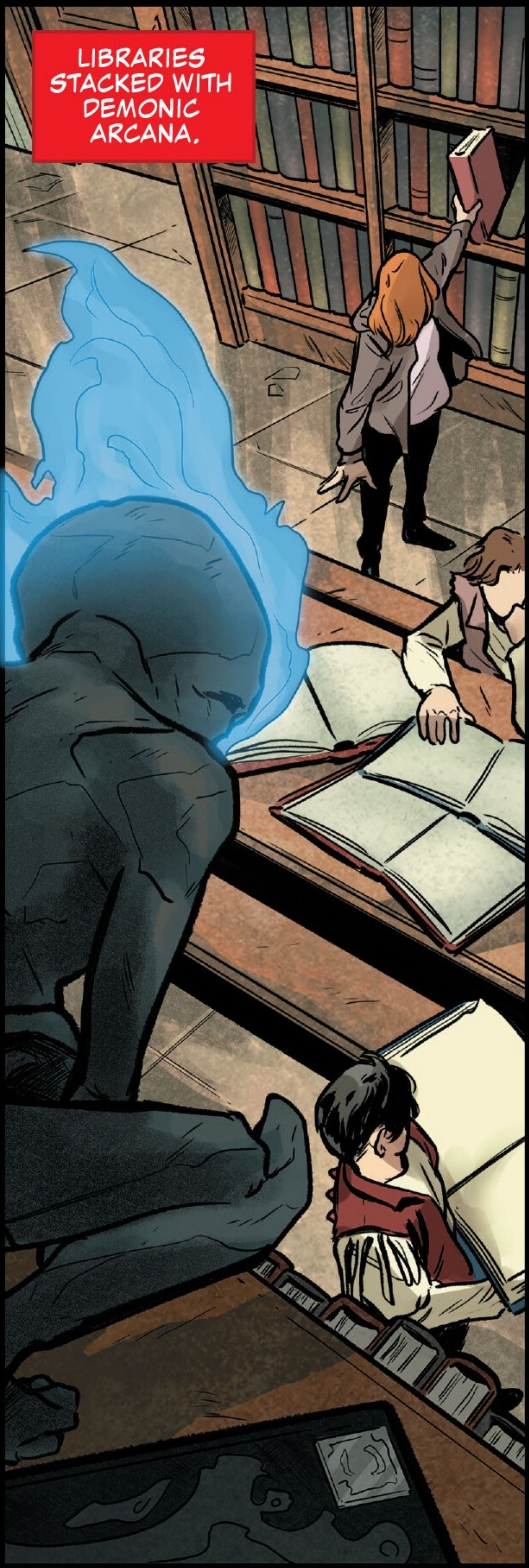
THE PAST. BOSTON.
HOME OF TALIA WARROAD.
ALL THOSE YEARS AGO, WHEN MY PARENTS REACHED OUT TO *DOCTOR STRANGE* FOR HELP, HE SAW THAT MY HOUSE WAS STAINED.
HE RECOGNIZED THAT YEARS AND YEARS OF MY ANGST AND ANGER AND RESENTMENT AND CHAOTIC RITUALS...
...HAD SOAKED INTO THE WOOD AND TILE AND DRYWALL.
HE KNEW THAT CLEANSING IT OF ITS DARKNESS WAS THE FIRST STEP TOWARD HELPING ME.
THE HOUSE HAD GROWN BIGGER ON THE INSIDE THAN ON THE OUTSIDE, WARPED BY MAGIC.
AND IT WAS HOST TO SOMETHING FOUL.

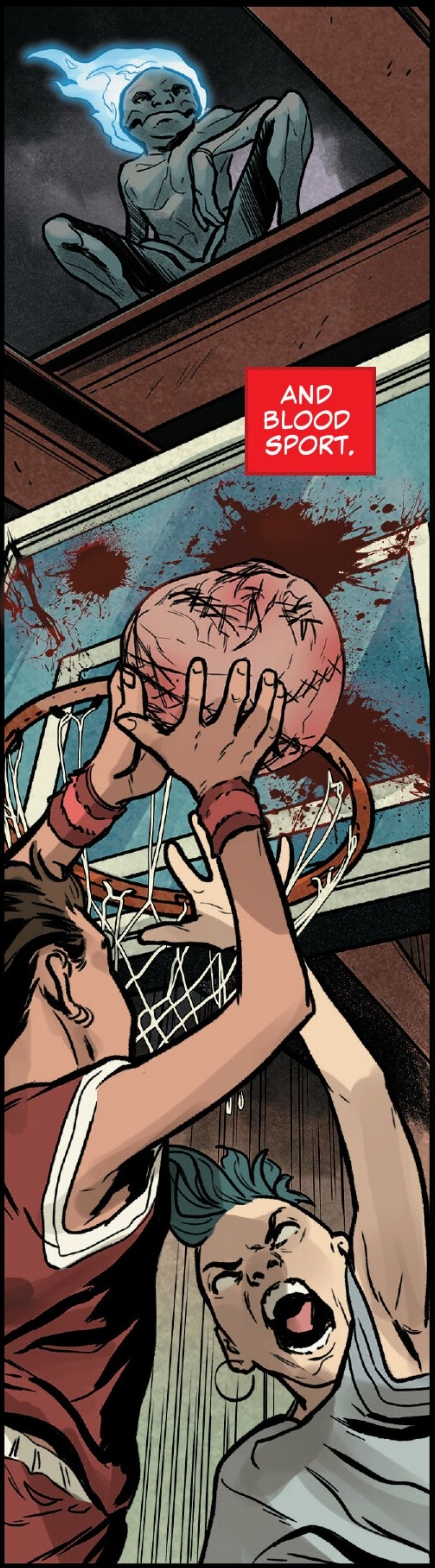

IT WAS AND WAS NOT *MEPHISTO.*


A MANIFESTATION OF HIS DARKNESS...
...SCULPTED LIKE A *GOLEM.*


PRESENT DAY. COLORADO.
NOW JOHNNY AND I HAVE CRAFTED SOMETHING SIMILAR. A BINDING OF OUR TROUBLED ESSENCES.
I MOVED WITH THE MOONCHILD THROUGH THE SCHOOL.

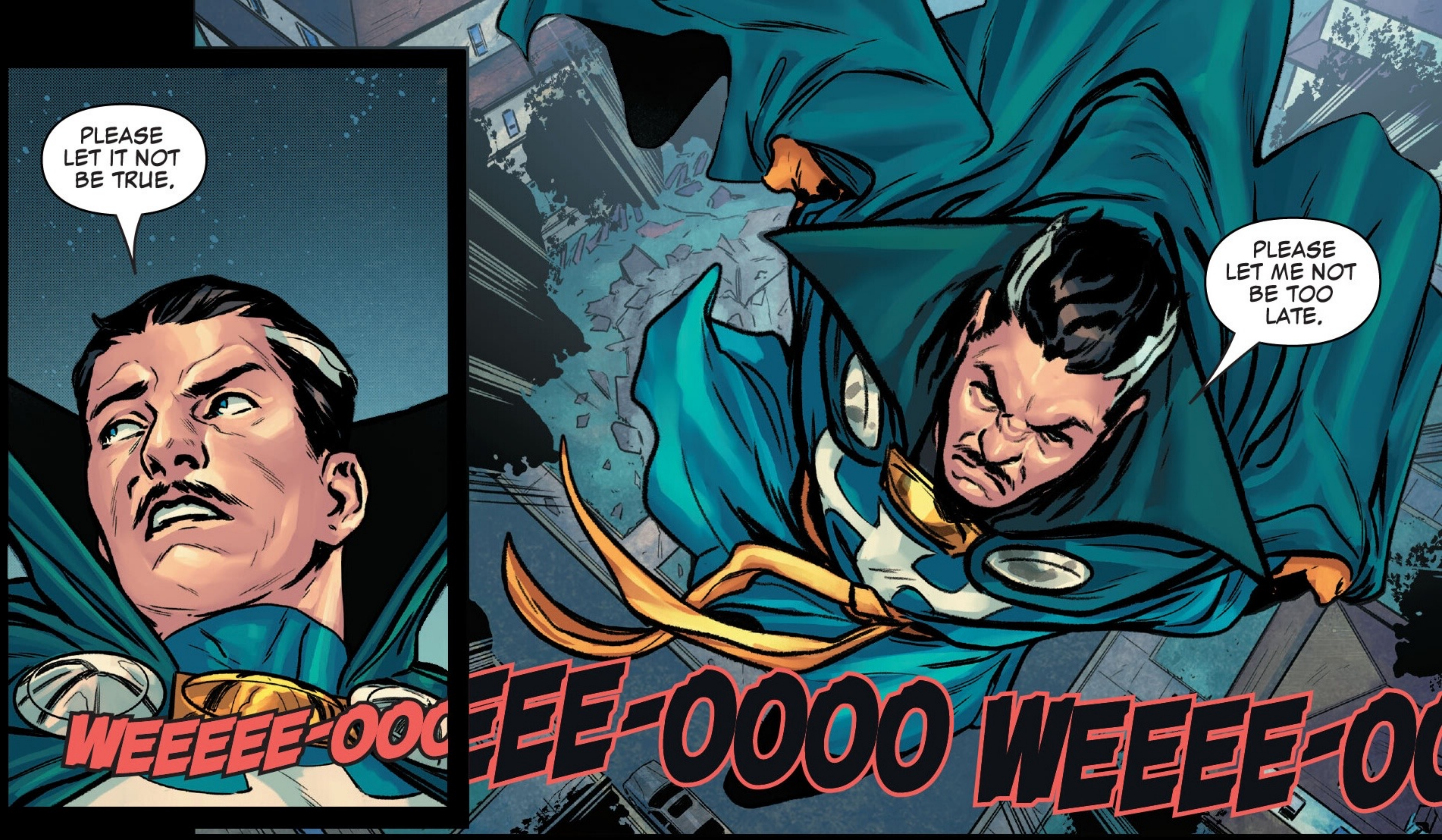

I SAW LABORATORIES THAT OFFERED AN EDUCATION IN PAIN.

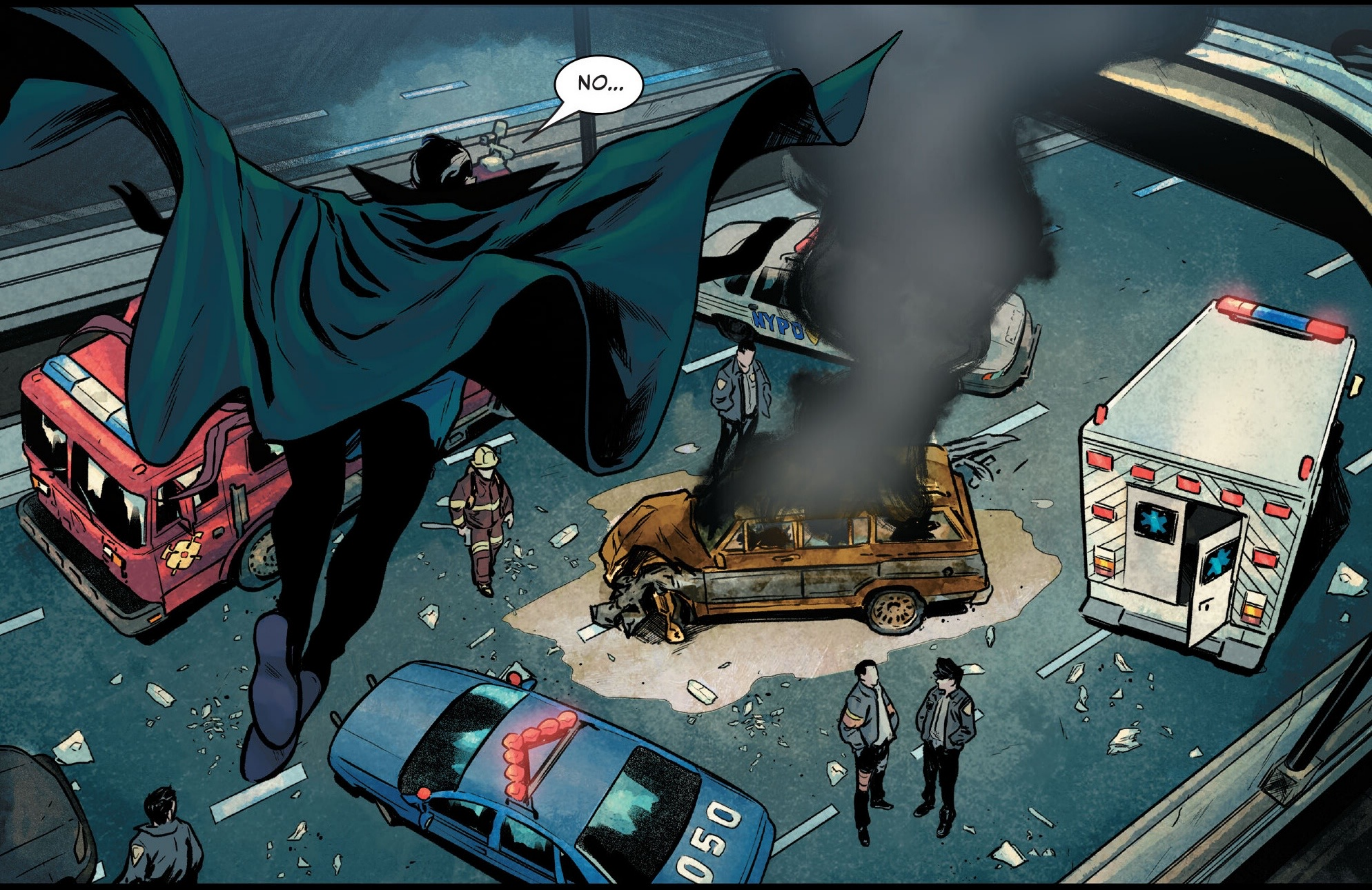

LIBRARIES STACKED WITH DEMONIC ARCANA.

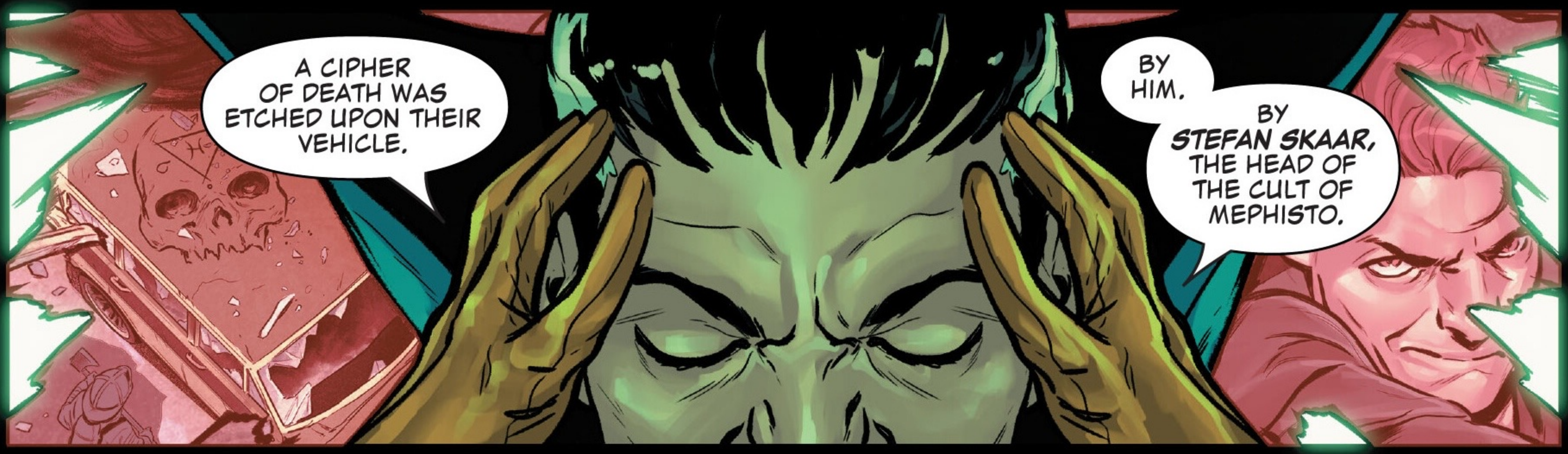

AND BLOOD SPORT.

BUT BECAUSE OF WHAT WAS HAPPENING OUTSIDE...
...I LOST MY CONNECTION...
...I LOST CONTROL...
...AND SOMEONE WAS WAITING TO ENLIST THE CHILD AS THEIR OWN.
SLAM

THE PAST.
BE GONE FROM THIS PLACE, FOUL BEAST!
MEPHISTO HAS NO CLAIM ON TALIA WARROAD.
FWOOSH
SNFF SNFF
THEY NEVER LOVED ME.
THEY WISHED I WASN'T DIFFERENT. THEY WISHED I WAS LIKE EVERYBODY ELSE.
WELL, I WISH THEY WERE DEAD.
AND I FINALLY GOT MY WISH.
THEY'RE...
...DEEEAAAAAD.


PLEASE LET IT NOT BE TRUE.
PLEASE LET ME NOT BE TOO LATE.
WEEEEE-OOO
EEE-OOOO WEEEE-OO


NO...
NYPD
050


A CIPHER OF DEATH WAS ETCHED UPON THEIR VEHICLE.
BY HIM.
BY **STEFAN SKAAR,** THE HEAD OF THE CULT OF MEPHISTO.

THE PRESENT.
RELEASE HER!
GAK!
WHATEVER FORCE INHABITS YOU...
JOHNNY!
...YOU ARE STILL MADE OF WOOD THAT SPLINTERS.
MMMAAARR!

I WAS SWALLOWED UP THEN...
...WHILE THE RIDER FOUGHT TO SAVE ME.
FWOOOOSH
THERE WAS A PART OF ME THAT FELT GRATEFUL.
AND ANOTHER PART THAT FELT BOTH GUILTY AND RESENTFUL.
SHK
THIS WAS ALL HAPPENING BECAUSE OF ME.

VREEEEEE
I HAD DRAGGED JOHNNY INTO THIS...
...JUST AS I HAD DRAGGED MY PARENTS INTO THIS.
KHRRRRRR
EVERYONE AROUND ME WAS DOOMED TO SUFFER.
AND IT DIDN'T MATTER HOW MANY DEMONS I SENT BACK TO THE SULFUR PITS...
KREEENCH
...I COULDN'T MAKE UP FOR THE HELL I'D BROUGHT INTO THIS WORLD.
PLEASE!
WE NEED TO HURRY.

THE PAST. MASSACHUSETTS.
IT HURTS NOW, I KNOW. BECAUSE THE CUT IS FRESH.
BUT IT'LL HEAL. YOU'LL MOVE ON.
EVERYBODY'S PARENTS DIE.
YOU'VE GOT A NEW FAMILY IN ME, TALIA.
I DOUBT SHE'LL WANT TO SPEND ANOTHER SECOND WITH YOU, STEFAN...
...WHEN SHE LEARNS YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE *MURDER* OF HER MOTHER AND FATHER.

GET THE OLD!
CUT HIM!
YES, PLEASE DO FORM AN ORDERLY LINE.
I BELIEVE YOU'RE ALL WANTED ON CHARGES...
...RANGING FROM TRUANCY TO VANDALISM TO ROBBERY-- THROUGHOUT NEW ENGLAND AND THE MID-ATLANTIC...
...SO I'VE ARRANGED THE PAPERWORK FOR YOUR ADMISSION TO A JUVENILE DETENTION CENTER.
STEFAN? WHAT'S HE TALKING ABOUT?!
DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT.
HE'S FULL OF @#%& AND HOT AIR.
KRRRKL

LET'S GET THE @#$% OUT OF HERE.
THE HELL?
YOU HAVE A CHOICE, TALIA.
TALIA!
AND IF YOU CHOOSE HIS WAY--IF YOU CHOOSE THE WAY OF BLOOD, OF FIRE, OF YOUR PARENTS' MURDERER--
--THEN YOU WILL SEAL YOUR FATE AS A DAMNED PRISONER OF MEPHISTO.
TALIA! TAKE MY HAND!
IS WHAT HE SAID TRUE?

I'LL GIVE YOU WHATEVER PLEASURE AND POWER YOU WANT.
TAKE MY HAND AND GET ME OUT OF HIS @#$% SPELL!
IT'S NOT HIS SPELL.
IT'S *MINE.*
AND I'M SENDING YOU TO HELL.
TALIA... DON'T.
DON'T DAMN HIM, OR YOU'LL BECOME JUST LIKE HIM.

ENOUGH!
COME WITH ME, TALIA.
YOU'RE A RAW, UNCOUTH TALENT.
BUT I CAN TEACH YOU. I CAN **REFINE** YOU.
@#$& YOU.
@#$& **BOTH** OF YOU.
I'M DONE FOLLOWING ANY ROAD BUT MY OWN.

PRESENT. COLORADO.
KRNCCHHH
MY FAILURE TO STOP STEFAN SKAAR...
...MEANT THAT THIS SCHOOL, IN A WAY, WAS FULL OF MY NEGLECTED CHILDREN.
STAY HERE.
I WANT TO FACE HIM ALONE.
AND I NEED YOU TO HOLD OFF HIS STUDENTS...
...BUT *DON'T* HURT THEM.

BEEN A WHILE, TALIA.
DID YOU KNOW--AFTER WE LAST SAW EACH OTHER--DOCTOR STRANGE SENT ME TO THE DUNGEON DIMENSION?
BUT I'VE NEVER MET A LOCK I COULDN'T PICK.
EVENTUALLY.
YOU'VE BEEN BUSY.
RUINING THE LIVES AND MESSING UP THE HEADS OF A WHOLE NEW GENERATION OF KIDS.
YOU KNOW...I ALWAYS IMAGINED THE TWO OF US WOULD ONE DAY HAVE A CHILD.
BUT IF THIS GRAVE-DIRT PUPPET IS ALL YOU'RE CAPABLE OF PRODUCING, I THINK I'M BETTER OFF WITHOUT YOU.
"I'VE GOT ALL KINDS OF CHILDREN.
"A WHOLE SCHOOL FULL OF THEM.
"AND I'VE TAUGHT THEM WELL."

GO ON. SHOW MOMMY YOUR NICE BALLOON.
THIS WORLD REWARDS THE NORMALS. THE ONES WHO PUNCH THEIR TIME CARDS AND GO TO BED BY TEN AND NEVER QUESTION THE SYSTEM.
IT'S THE REAL HELL. A BEIGE-COLORED HELL FULL OF FERTILIZED LAWNS AND MORTGAGE PAYMENTS AND SOCIAL MEDIA ALGORITHMS.
I'M HERE FOR THE FREAKS WHO ACTUALLY HAVE THE POWER TO BRING THAT WHOLE STUPID, PUNISHING WORLD CRASHING DOWN.
I GET TO THEM BEFORE THEY'RE INDOCTRINATED AND DIPLOMAED AND NUMBED BY PHARMACEUTICALS.
YOU USED TO UNDERSTAND THAT DESIRE.
POP
BUT NOW YOU'RE WHAT? LIKE, A COP? CHASING DOWN SINNERS?
@#$%& PATHETIC.
IT WAS NICE SEEING YOU AGAIN, TALIA. BRIEFLY.
YOU'LL BE DEAD SOON.
THE DARKNESS -KOFF- WAS ALWAYS INSIDE ME...
...YOU WERE -KOFF KOFF- THE ONE WHO TAUGHT ME TO CONTROL IT.

"BUT YOU'RE WRONG ABOUT THOSE KIDS.
ALL OF YOUR ANGER...ALL OF YOUR HATE...
...ALL OF YOUR TRESPASSES...
"THEY DON'T WANT TO HURT THEMSELVES OR OTHERS, NO MATTER WHAT THEY SAY.
...I WILL SWALLOW.
YOU ARE FORGIVEN.
"ALL THEY WANT IS *LOVE*."
THE THING IS -KOFF- I WAS A BETTER STUDENT THAN YOU WERE A TEACHER.
I WAS BETTER THAN YOU THEN.
AND I'M A *HELL* OF A LOT BETTER THAN YOU NOW.
FWOOSH

I'VE SEEN GHOSTS MY WHOLE LIFE.
BUT THERE ARE ONLY TWO I'M SCARED OF.
MY MOTHER AND FATHER.
BECAUSE THEY'D BE ALIVE IF NOT FOR ME.
WHEN I WAS A CHILD AND I TOLD MY MOTHER I WAS SCARED OF THE DARK, SHE TOLD ME TO CLOSE MY EYES.
SHE DIDN'T REALIZE THE DARKNESS I FOUND INSIDE MYSELF WAS EVEN MORE PROFOUND.
MY EYES ARE WIDE OPEN NOW.
I'M NOT AFRAID ANYMORE.

AS LONG AS I CAN RID THIS WORLD OF STEFAN AND THE CULT OF MEPHISTO...
...I CAN LEAVE WITH NO REGRETS...
...EXCEPT FOR JOHNNY.
TALIA?!
TALIA, NO!
I'M SORRY, JOHNNY.
BUT MY PAST FINALLY CAUGHT UP WITH ME.
TALIA!

I GOT THE KIDS HOME TO THEIR FAMILIES...
...AND TOLD THE PARENTS TO KEEP THEM CLOSE.
I'D DO ANYTHING TO HAVE WHAT THEY HAVE.
SOMEONE TO LOVE. SOMEONE TO LOVE ME BACK.
BUT ALONE'S WHERE I BELONG.
ANYBODY WHO GETS CLOSE TO ME ENDS UP DEAD...
...OR DAMNED.
THE ONLY ONE I CAN'T SEEM TO QUIT IS THE SPIRIT.
BUT I'VE BEEN HEARING THINGS AND SEEING THINGS LATELY THAT MAKE ME WONDER.
A RAVEN CAWING. THE WIND BLOWING THROUGH A FOREST. THE EMBERS IN A CAMPFIRE SHIFTING.
THEY ALL SEEM TO BE WHISPERING THE SAME THING...
YOUR TIME AS THE GHOST RIDER IS ABOUT TO COME TO AN END.
NOT THE END...

ANNUAL variant by GREG LAND & FRANK D'ARMATA

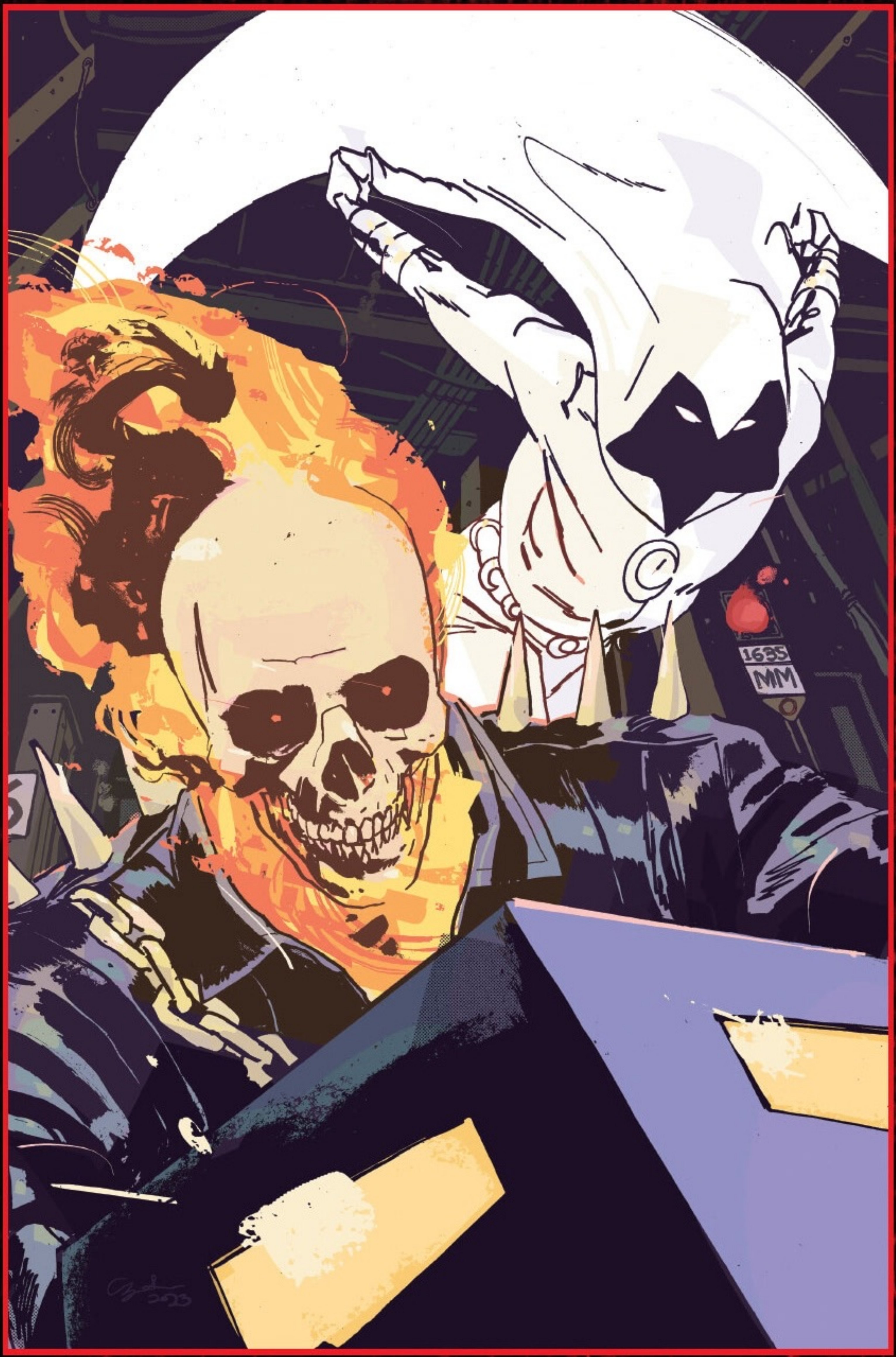
#18 variant by
DECLAN SHALVEY

#18 Stormbreakers variant by
NIC KLEIN

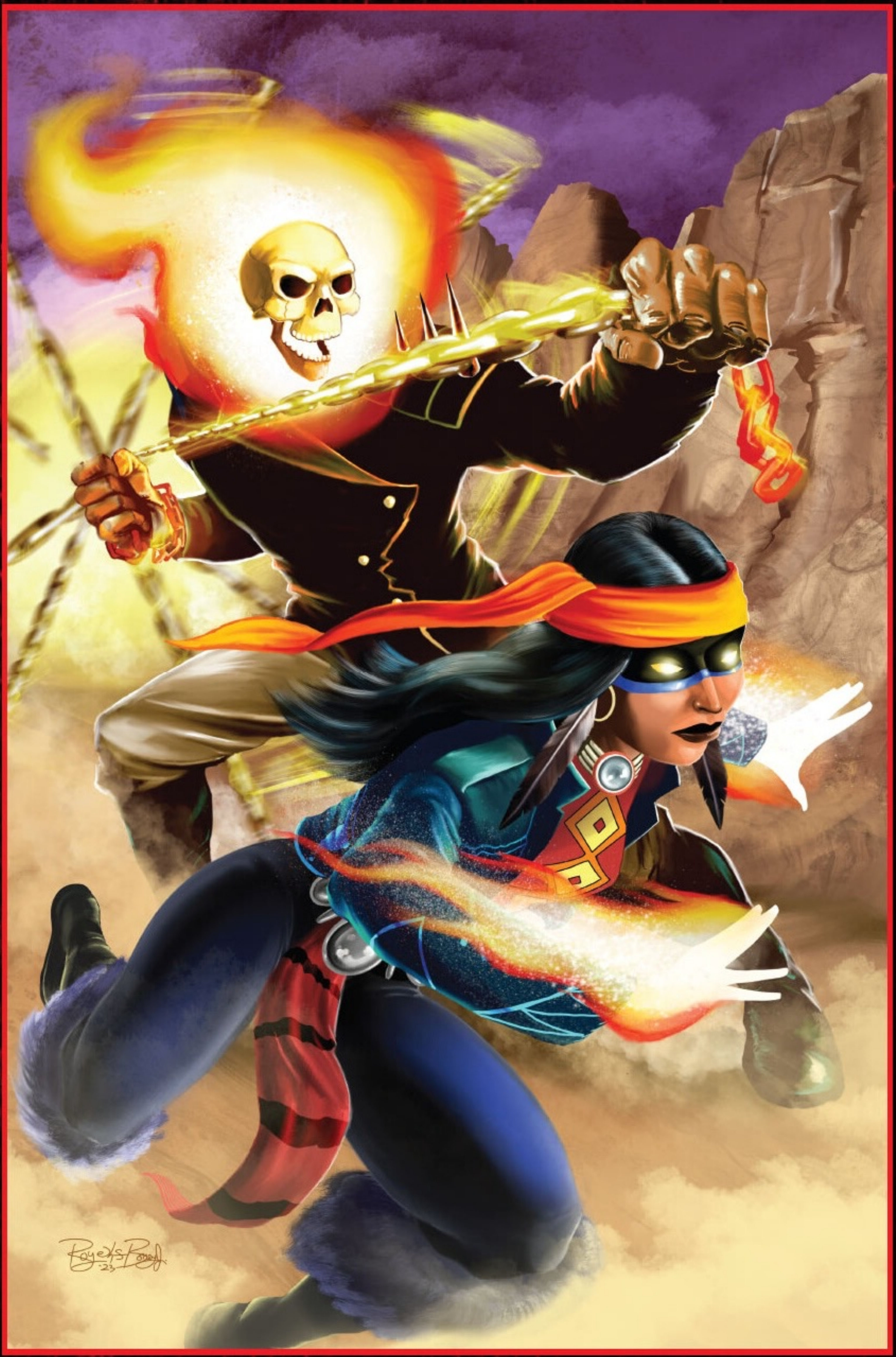
#19 variant by
MARCO MASTRAZZO

#19 New Champions variant by
LUCIANO VECCHIO

#20 variant by ELIZABETH TORQUE



#20 Knight's End variant by
PAUL AZACETA



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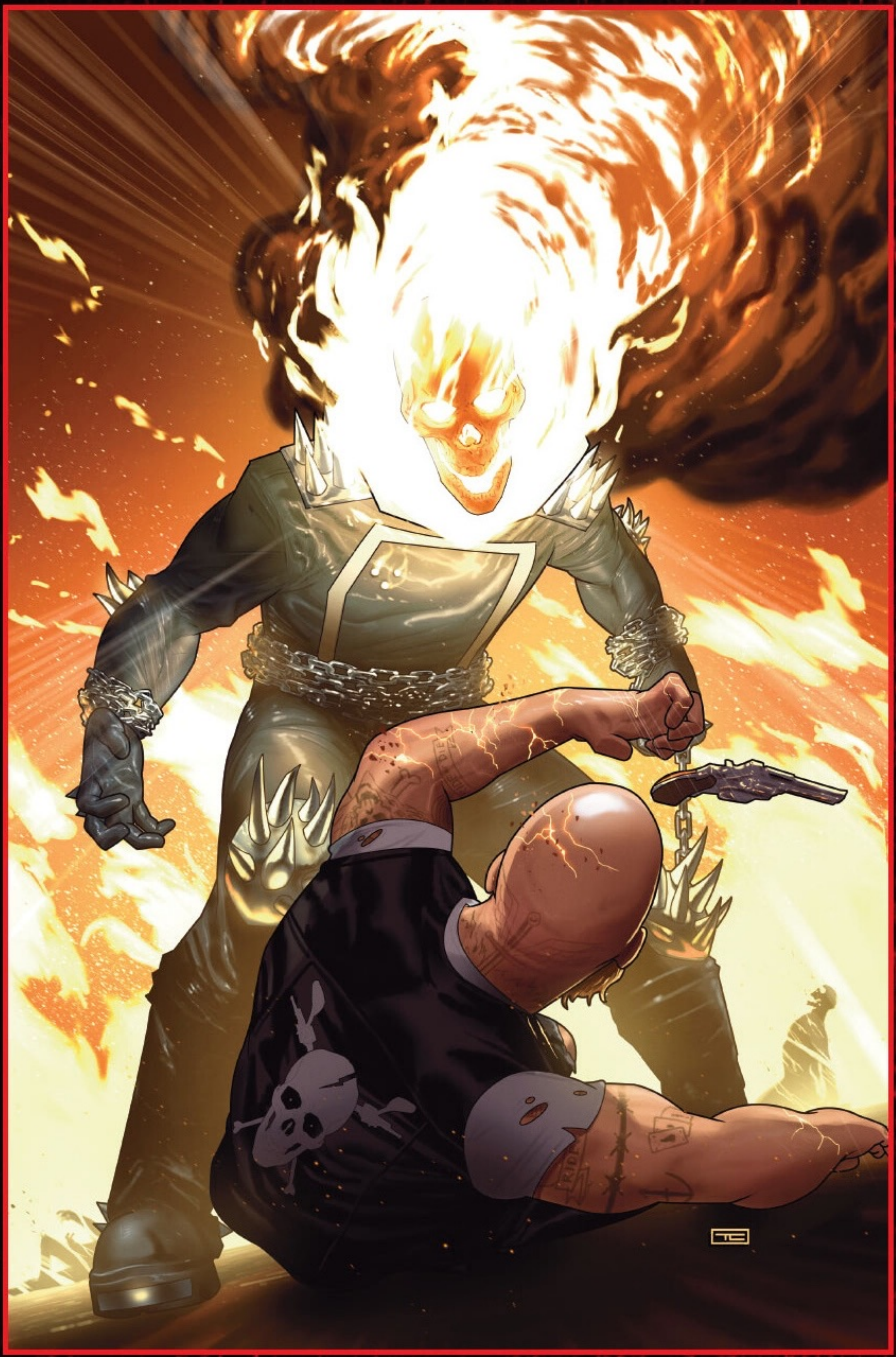

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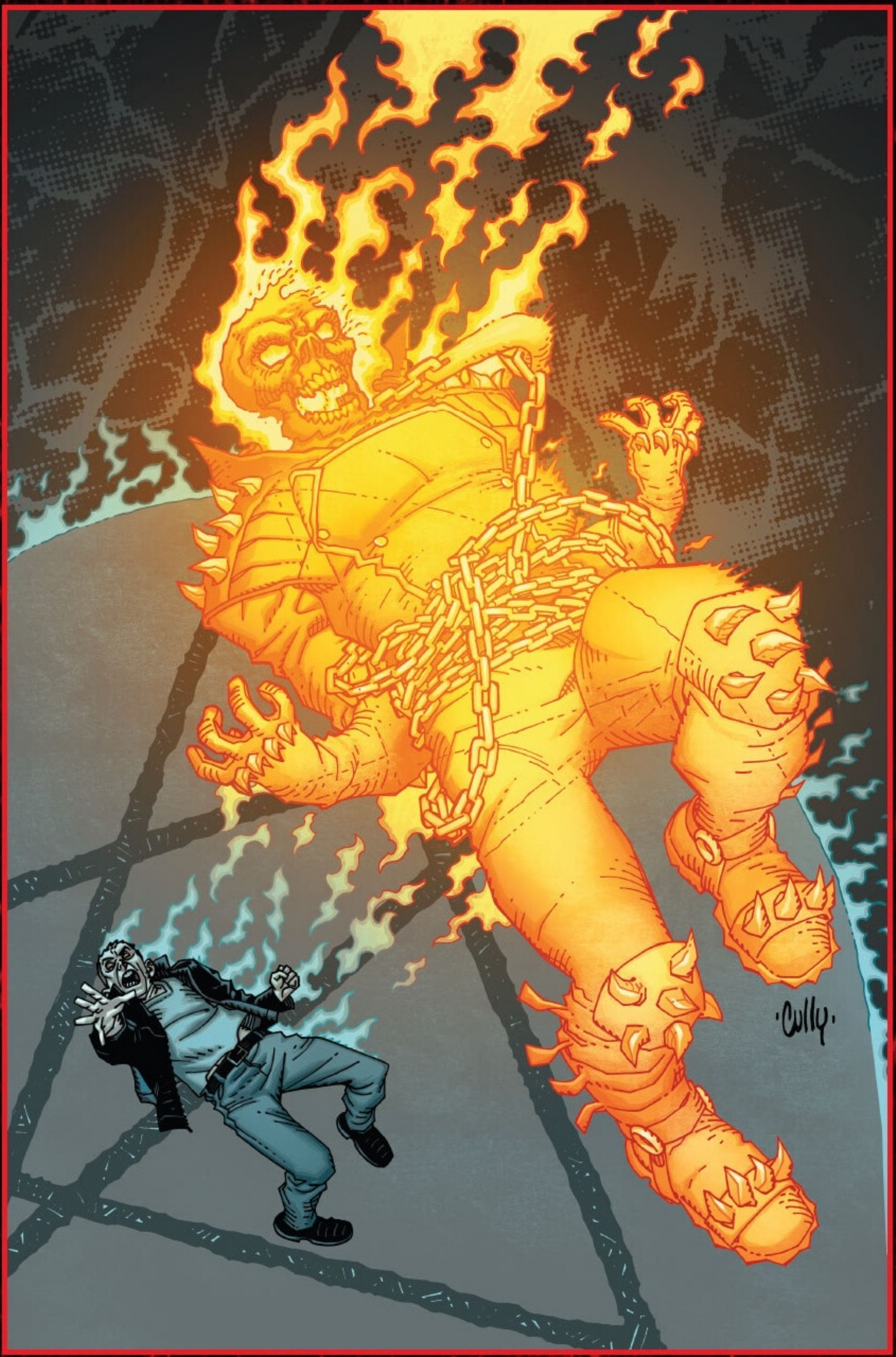

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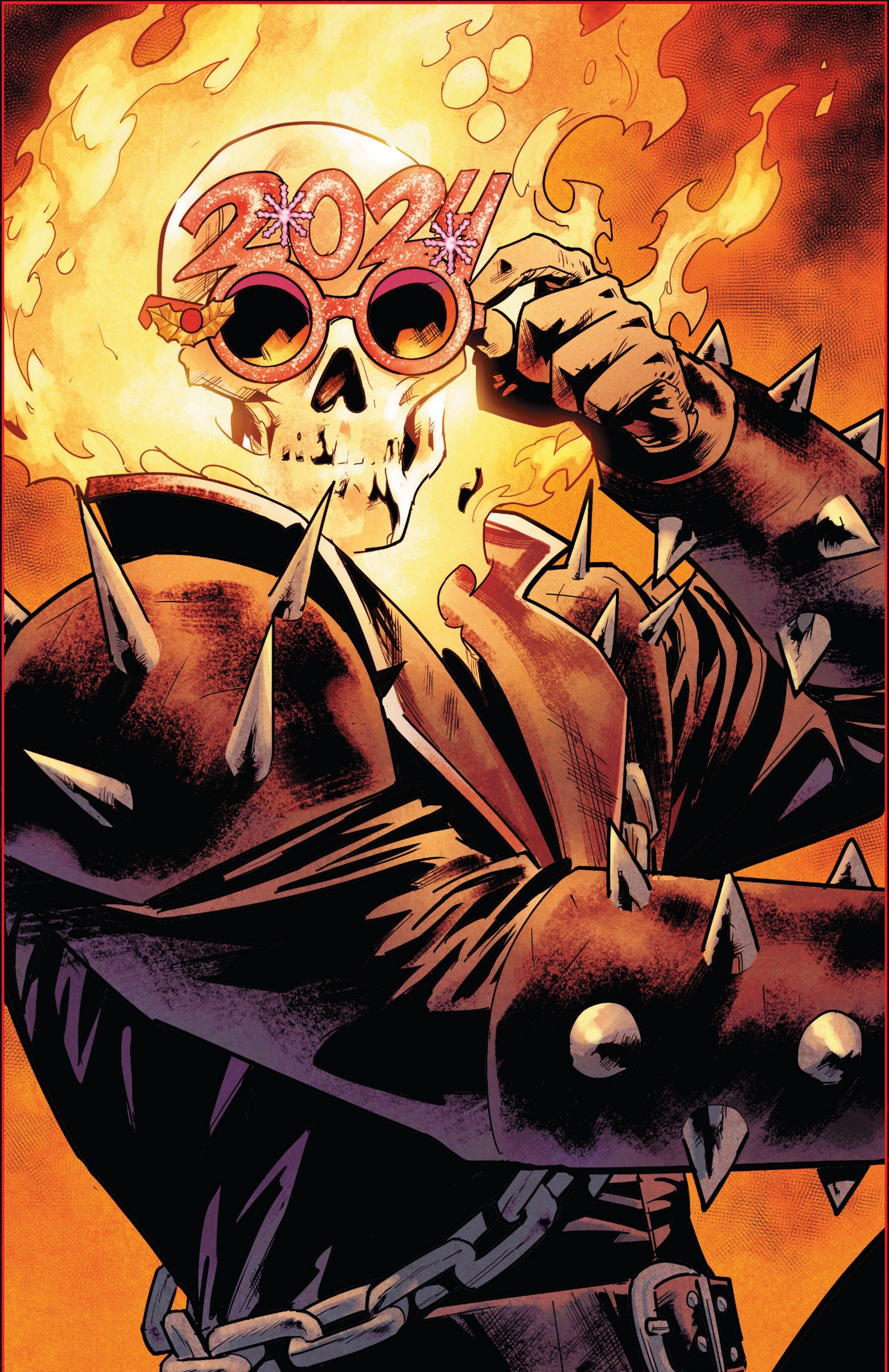

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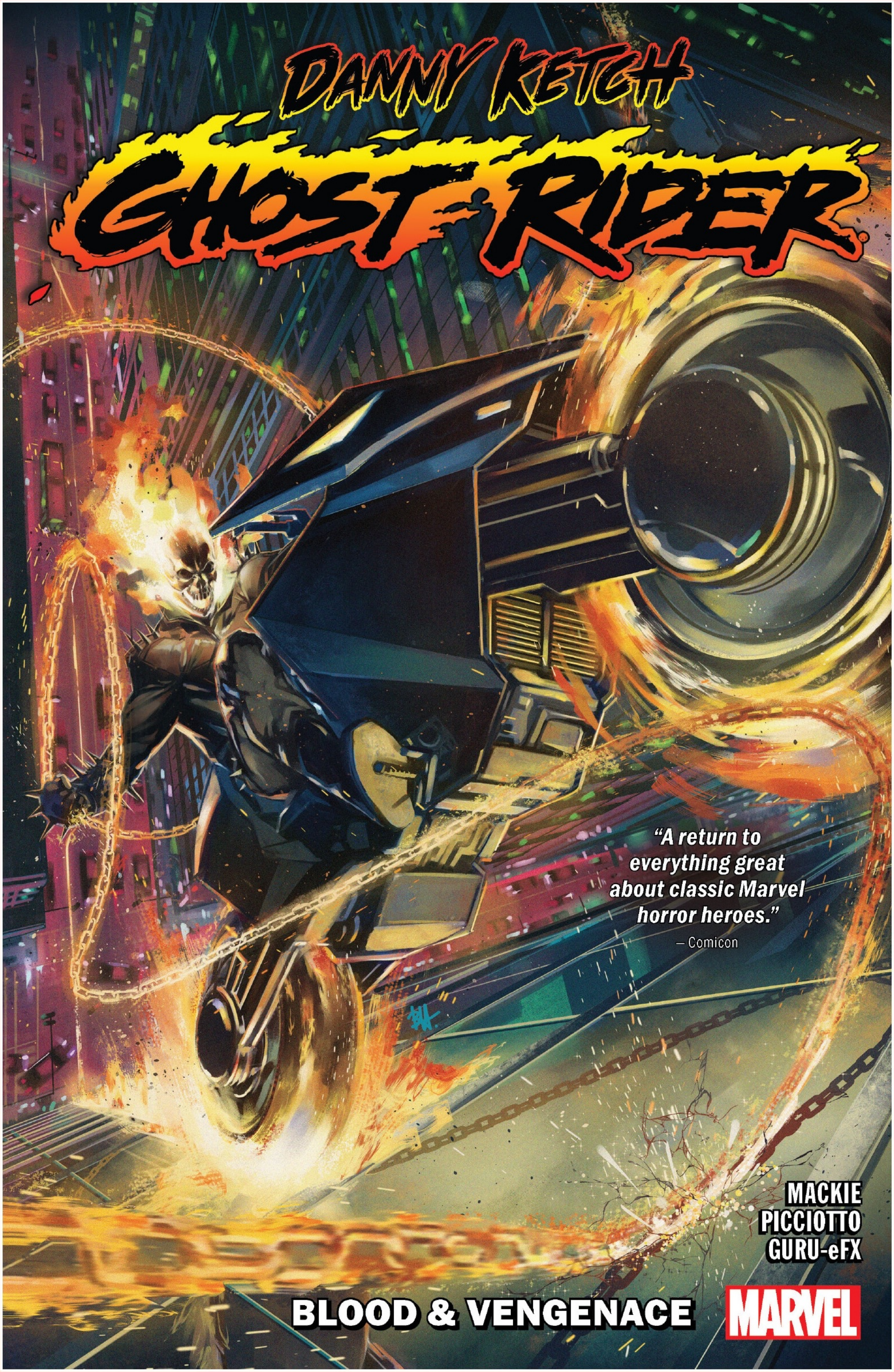
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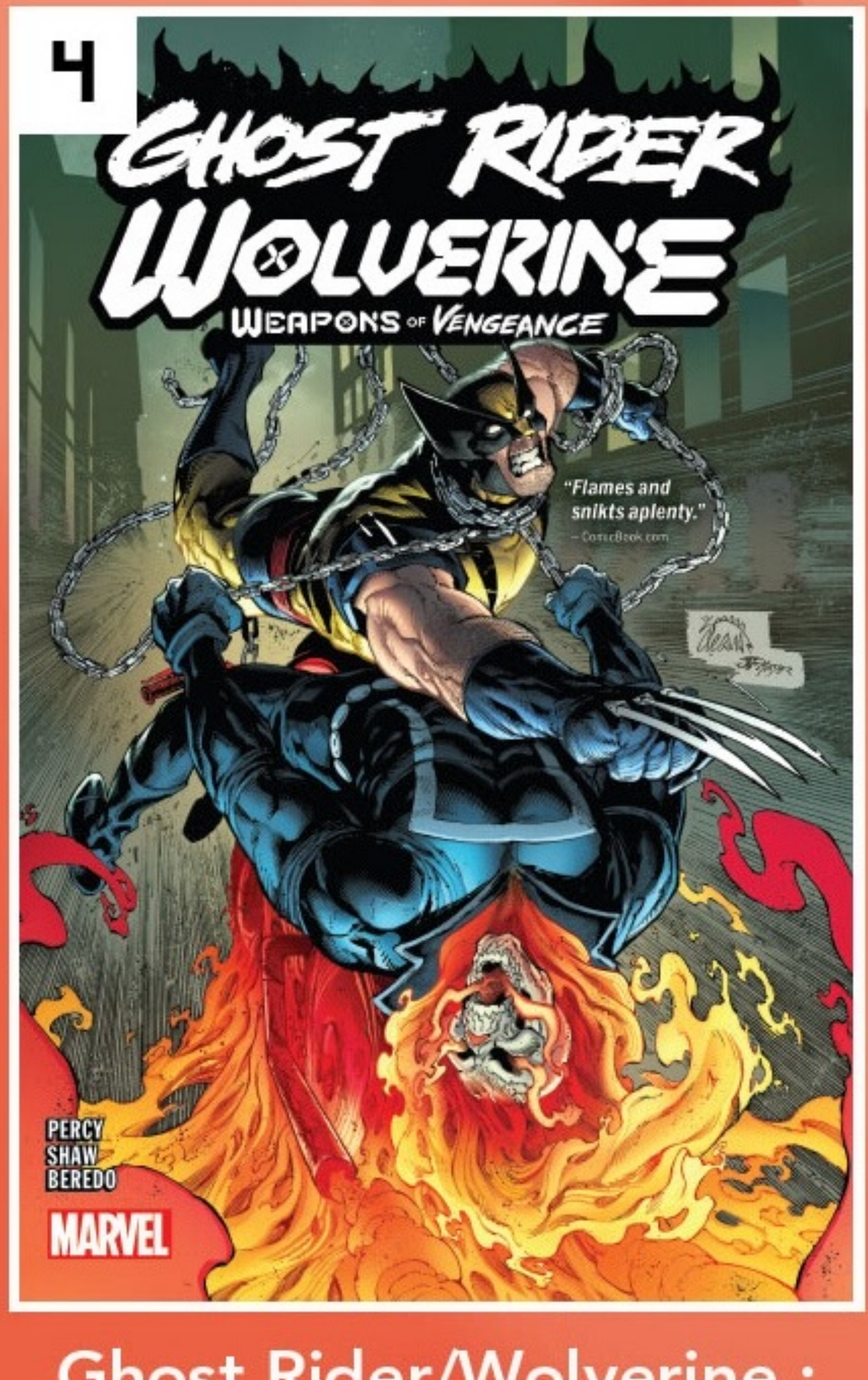
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